

KNIGHTS OF THE PIGSKIN by BURT L. STANDISH
TWICE-A-MONTH 15 CENTS

Top-Notch Magazine

NOV. 1
1924





Announcing The New Pettijohn's

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AFTER a long time spent in making it just right, here is the finest Whole Wheat Cereal Food ever produced—the New PETTIJOHN'S. Its popularity is bound to be quick, complete, and permanent—because—

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3. A new and delicious Flavor brought out by pre-cooking.

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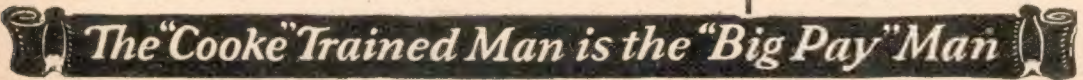
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TOP-NOTCH

TWICE-A-MONTH MAGAZINE

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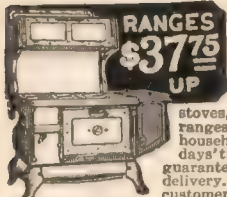
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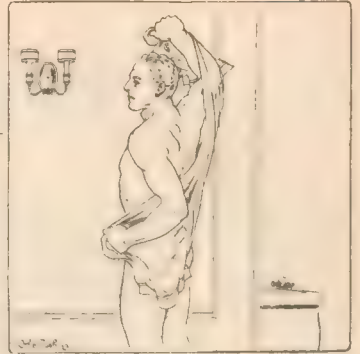
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TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

VOL. LX

Published November 1, 1924

No. 1



Knights of the Pigskin. By Burt L. Standish



(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

BREAKING ORDERS.



T was hard on Hale Patterson that fate had to unload such a raft of trouble upon him on the night before the last and most important game of the football season. Responsibility for his share of the varsity honors was enough for the star half back to carry, without having a lot of personal matters crop out to pester him.

Not that private troubles could or would interfere with his play. Patterson was one of those rare individuals who forget everything but the game from the moment the whistle blows. "Chug" he had been christened in prep school, because he chug-chug-chugged through his lessons like a reliable old steamboat headed upstream and laboring hard, but

as certain to reach port as the sun is to rise in the morning.

Although slow and sure in his studies, once drop him on the limed lines and he was a man transformed; speed was his middle name, and he chugged like a high-powered speed boat—just as reliable and just as certain as he was in the classroom.

So it chanced that the stickful of type in the afternoon paper gave him some bad moments, but was powerless to influence him for better or worse so far as his game against Brighton the next day was concerned. The Walthall squad had orders to be in bed by nine p. m., and Patterson was on time to a dot; but before he turned out his light, he wooed Morpheus by scanning a late news sheet. In it he found this:

The robbery at Judge Amos Briscoe's in Walthall still remains a seemingly impenetrable mystery. Five one-thousand-dollar cou-

pon bonds of the Perrigord Light & Power Co., Nos. A 1612 to 1616, were abstracted from the safe in the judges' study, but how or by whom is one of those amazing secrets possibly destined never to be revealed. On the evening of the robbery the judge's nephew, Hale Patterson, the famous "Chug" Patterson and pride of the Walthall football fans, had called at the house for an hour; then, a short time after he left, another nephew, equally famous on the gridiron, Fortescue of the Brighton Varsity, dropped in and spent the night with his uncle.

Neither of the football stars saw or heard anything of a suspicious nature about the Briscoe house or grounds; and apart from the judge and his household, the two nephews are the only ones whose testimony is at all competent. Fortescue, who slept in a room next to his uncle's study, declares he would have heard any intruder tampering with the safe. His theory is that the judge mislaid the bonds and that sooner or later they will turn up. But the judge disagrees.

"The way that fool article is put together," growled Patterson, "it looks as though Cousin Jerry and I might both be under suspicion. And I was there only from eight thirty to nine! Ah, splash!"

Then he threw aside the paper, punched the light switch, and settled down on his pillow. He was not disturbed to any appreciable extent. Judge Briscoe had more money than he could possibly spend, and five thousand dollars meant little to him; but to be named in a news item as one of the two nephews whose testimony was "competent" had an indirection that left a bad taste in Patterson's mouth. The taste was not disagreeable enough to keep him awake, however. Almost immediately he dozed off into dreamless slumber.

Then, again almost immediately as it seemed to him, the phone on the stand at the head of the bed began to jingle. Instinctively Patterson sat up in the dark, groped for the phone, and pressed the receiver to his ear. "Hello!" he called sleepily.

"That you, Chug? Well, I guess you haven't forgotten who this is."

Patterson was wide awake on the instant. "It's my cousin, Jerry Fortescue, if I'm not asleep and dreaming," he countered, and stifled a large amount of wonder.

"Maybe you're thinking it's a bad dream," the other voice went on, in the half-slurring, half-jeering tone which was one of Fortescue's accomplishments and

specialties. "How is the big little man of Walthall coming along these days?"

Patterson stifled his temper along with his wonder. "He'd come along a lot more comfortably, Jerry," he answered mildly, "if he didn't have to dodge your oral bricks and left-handed compliments. Is this all you're waking me up in the middle of the night for—just to phone me your regards?"

"It's only eleven thirty, Chug, and I want to have a talk with you."

"Go ahead, Jerry; you're having it."

"I mean phiz to phiz, company front. What I want to talk about is important, mighty important, and won't do over the wire. Meet me in fifteen minutes outside the south fence of Brighton Athletic Field. I'll go right over there and be waiting."

"Say, look here," protested Patterson, "to-morrow's the big game, and the order for our squad was bed by nine and no rambling with anybody but Morpheus until sunup."

"Is little Chug afraid of his coach and his captain?" taunted Jerry. "There was a similar order for this camp, but I've got the nerve to break it—in a matter of real personal importance, like this. Another thing, Chug," and here the voice of Jerry grew even more offensive, "I could sit up all night and still help Brighton play Walthall off its feet to-morrow afternoon. Be a sport, Chug. Sneak out of the hostelry and come on. You can be big in little things and little in big things—and this isn't so much."

Patterson's black hair started to rise, but he smoothed it down with the forearm of the hand holding the receiver. He was tempted to hang up without more ado, and then he thought of the paper and the item about the robbery. Could it be that Fortescue had something to tell him about that? It was only a flash of foreboding, but it served.

"All right, I'll come," said Patterson between his teeth, "just to get close enough to you to find out what you mean by that slam about being little in big things. South of the athletic field, eh? I'll not keep you waiting long."

He slammed the receiver into the hooks and dropped the phone on the stand; then, rising cautiously, he dressed in the

dark and with as little noise as possible. Wharton, head coach for Walthall, had a room directly across the corridor, and it would not have been wise to let Wharton suspect that one of his backs was leaving the hotel for a nocturnal prowl.

"I'll find out what Jerry has got up his sleeve," thought Patterson gloomily, while getting into his clothes. "For two years now I've been as popular with him as a hard case of measles, and I'm getting tired of his low-down insinuations. It's pretty rank of me to smash a rule right under Wharton's nose, but I'm in too good trim for my work to-morrow to have it suffer because of losing a little sleep. Maybe I can find out what's making Jerry act like this—or possibly I can get a line on something else."

There was a November tang in the night air, and Patterson's last move before leaving the room was to take his light-gray overcoat over his arm. Softly he let himself out into the dimly lighted corridor and left his door unlocked behind him. All up and down the hall there was darkness back of the open transoms where gridiron warriors of Walthall had their quarters—darkness, out of which came the sounds of deep and regular breathing.

Patterson negotiated two flights of stairs and left the hotel through a wash room and by way of a side entrance. Out of the lobby there came to his ears the voice of a group of Walthall rooters, mostly visiting alumni, chanting the praises of the Blue and White, their university colors. A guilty feeling smote Patterson as the side door closed behind him; but he brushed it resolutely aside, salving his conscience with the thought that his personal affairs gave him full warrant for what he was doing.

His course to the athletic field carried him along dark and deserted streets, past the Brighton campus with its big elms, past a huge dormitory and one of the "frat" houses, and so on to the great fenced inclosure out of which the white goal posts reached skeleton fingers into the moonlight.

Patterson, somehow reminded of dereliction to duty, clamped his jaws hard, turned along the east fence, and so came to the southern side of the great quadrangle. As he rounded the fence corner,

a man in a light-colored overcoat disentangled himself from the shadows and stepped out into the moonbeams.

"All right, Jerry," said Patterson briefly. "I feel like a sneak, but I'm here."

Jerry Fortescue, even in that dull light, was a fine figure of a devil-may-care lad. The cap, worn well back on his well-shaped head, allowed his curly yellow hair to ripple over his brows. In the good old days when Chug and Jerry were friends, friends almost of the Damon and Pythias or David and Jonathan sort, Chug's pride in his tall, vikinglike cousin had been immense; for Chug was a plain plodder, without any æsthetic trimmings. Something of the old admiration stirred in Patterson now, mixed with that profound mystery which had to do with the change that had come into the personal relations of himself and his cousin.

"I was wondering if you'd have the nerve, Chug," remarked Fortescue, flip-pant and jeering as over the telephone. "Come across the road—there's a place there where we can talk to better purpose."

Fortescue led the way. An old deserted barn faced the road across from the athletic field, and the Brighton man paused to open the sagging door. The door stuck, but Fortescue managed it and faded into the blank dark. Patterson followed; and there, in the gloomy interior of the barn, the two cousins faced each other.

"Jerry," said Patterson, first to speak, "somehow you are getting me all wrong. That's my main reason for breaking away from our crowd at the hotel and coming to meet you to-night. Maybe something has happened that you'll give me a chance to explain, and—"

"Bet your sweet life there's something, but you can't lie out of it, Patterson!" There was nothing flippant, nothing jeering, about Fortescue now; if his voice indicated anything, it was cold rage and determination. "You've been putting the skids under me with Uncle Amos; you've used your stand-in with the old geezer to make him leery of me. He has cut my allowance in two and swears he'll eliminate it altogether if I don't change my ways. My ways were good enough

for him up to a short time ago, but when you took to peddling lies about me——”

“Stow that!” ordered Patterson sternly. “I haven’t any more of a stand-in with the judge than you have, and you know it. You’re the only one of us that ever got an allowance from him, and that ought to show who’s his pet. There was plenty for him to hear about you, though, but none of it came from me.” By an effort, Patterson got the whip hand of his mounting temper. “Jerry,” he went on, “what’s come over you? For two years now you haven’t been the old Jerry Fortescue I used to know. What’s back of it all?”

“Don’t bring up the old days,” said Fortescue furiously; “I didn’t begin to know you then as I know you now. Last Saturday I had a hurry-up call from Uncle Amos to come to Walthall for an overnight visit. That’s when he cut the allowance and read me a lecture. What the old duck said was a-plenty. And I got to the house less than half an hour after you’d been there. Two and two,” snarled Fortescue; “put ’em together.”

“You’ve been too fast in putting two and two together,” declared Patterson. “The judge asked me to come to the house. All he wanted was three good seats for the game to-morrow. I delivered the tickets. All that was said about you by the judge was this: ‘I wish, Hale, that you and Jerry would act more like dignified seniors and less like a couple of kindergarten kids.’ I told him I was ready any time you were.”

“Oh, I’ll bet you soft-soaped him!” Fortescue sneered. “Well, I needed twice my full allowance, but all I drew was half my regular pay. I’m out of that hole, but no thanks to you. To-morrow afternoon your eleven and mine will play off their varsity differences back of that fence across the road; but our personal differences we may as well settle here and now.” Fortescue lifted his voice. “Lanterns!” he called.

Instantly half a dozen lights broke out of the gloom, lanterns suddenly uncovered by as many underclassmen, each man holding his light high and moving forward until the cousins were hemmed in by a glimmering circle.

Patterson blinked in the yellow glare

and flashed his gaze around the cordon formed by Fortescue’s aides. “I’m beginning to get wise,” he observed. “Frame-up, eh, Jerry? The wonder is that you got any one to help you with such a scheme. You don’t want to talk; you’ve got the fool idea that you want to fight. Can’t you use a little sense? My team is going to need me in the back field to-morrow and——”

“And so you refuse to give me satisfaction,” blustered Fortescue. “I’m going to give you something to think about, Chug, but I’ll not cripple you. My friends will keep hands off no matter which way the bout goes.” He tore off his box coat and flung it aside. “Get ready, Chug!”

“Wait a minute,” insisted Patterson, making no move to get ready, not even dropping the coat he carried over his arm. “I’ve broken rules to-night for the first time since I sat in at the training table. It was an error of judgment on my part, but I’m beginning now to get the proper angle on this thing, and I refuse to act the fool any longer.

“I’m going back to the hotel,” he went on. “After the game to-morrow we’ll break training, and I’ll belong more to myself and less to the varsity. Following the game, Jerry, I’ll give you all the satisfaction you want, or think you want; but to-night I’m saving all the fight in me for Brighton. If you had a thimbleful of sense you’d——” While he spoke, Patterson whirled and started for the door through which he had entered the place.

“Mind that door!” shouted Fortescue. “Head him off!”

The cordon of lanterns broke in a stampede. Three or four of the men with lanterns bunched in front of the closed door. Fortescue made a rush which Patterson evaded easily. The steamboat merely threw its helm hard over, and the rage-blinded Fortescue swooped past. Patterson could have struck his cousin—no boxer ever had a better opening—but he scorned to use his fist on a man who would be needed in an opposing back field the next day.

Instead of landing with his right on the lithe form that flashed by, Patterson made front on those blocking his road to freedom. He felt no reluctance in deal-

ing violently with that living barrier and dropped his overcoat and plunged as he might have plunged at an opposing line.

For a few minutes there was confusion. Lanterns dropped with a crash of glass and a stifling odor of spilled kerosene; and there was a brief, a very brief, give and take of thudding fists. A form that had desperately twined itself about Patterson's broad shoulders was torn loose and catapulted against Fortescue.

Fortescue staggered and lost his footing, and before he could free himself of the demoralized youth who had struck the floor with him, a glare of flame leaped upward blindingly from a litter of old straw heaped on the floor.

"Beat it, Jerry!" called a frightened voice. "The old dump's afire!"

The door was jammed again. Patterson, having cleared the enemy from in front of it, made a couple of tries to smash it down—then remembered his overcoat. He was careful of his belongings; he had to be, because of the low state of his finances. Turning back through a fog of smoke and a swirl of rushing flame, he gathered up the coat and rushed for a window with broken panes and a swinging sash.

"Where's Patterson?" demanded the enraged Fortescue, regaining his feet and staring about him with smarting eyes.

"Just smashed through a window!" came a wild answer. "By now, he's on his way back to the hotel."

"Why didn't you stop him?" asked Fortescue, coughing and spluttering.

"Him? Stop him? Say, Jerry, you ought to have brought along the whole varsity defense for that trick. We're checker champions and glee-club experts. Get busy and put out that blaze."

"Not a chance," growled Fortescue, baffled and wild. "Let the old shack go—it's been an eyesore long enough." He ran clear of the gathering smoke, picked up his own overcoat, and made a hasty exit through the window as Patterson had done a few minutes before. "Next time I go after a little personal satisfaction," he complained bitterly, "I'll bring a gang with me I can depend on."

The burning barn was the least of his troubles, and he moved rapidly along the road with his six companions at his heels.

A strange fellow was Jerry Fortescue, reasonable and unreasonable, surpassingly brilliant and surpassingly dull—a mixture of futility, high ability, wrongheadedness, and keen judgment—a psychological problem to all who knew him during his junior and senior years.

To no one was he a more perplexing problem than to his uncle, Judge Briscoe, and to his cousin, Hale Patterson.

CHAPTER II.

RIGHT BETWEEN THE EYES.

ON his way back to the hotel, Patterson paused near the college campus and looked around. At the very moment he turned, a tongue of flame from the doomed barn licked at the night sky. He was worried.

"What wind there is comes from the southeast," he reflected, noting the drift of the smoke and sparks, "and if that fire spreads to the stands across the road this will be a bad night's business for Brighton U. I've got to get to a telephone somewhere and call up the fire department! If——"

The thought had no more than taken shape in his mind when the steady clang of a distant bell suddenly broke on his ears.

"Jerry or some of his crowd must have beaten me to it," Patterson told himself, and proceeded on toward the hotel with a feeling of relief. He was bothered, however, regarding his cousin—not only perplexed but bewildered. "What's come over him?" ran his mental query. "He's crazy, crazier than I thought he was. Uncle Amos has evidently got his number, but I wish to thunder somebody would explain Jerry Fortescue to me so I could understand him."

Patterson reentered the hotel covertly by way of the side door and the wash room. The Walthall alumni had evidently called it a day and taken their enthusiasms to bed; but Patterson experienced a queer qualm when, approaching the door of his own room, he saw the glow of an electric light through the transom. He had left no light, and he had not locked his door. What did this mean? A moment later, as he opened the door, he knew what it meant.

Wharton, the head coach, in trousers, slippers, and pajama coat, stood by a window, looking across low roofs toward a rosy glow in the night sky to the south. He turned at the sound of the closing door.

"First time I ever knew you to put over anything like this, Patterson," the coach remarked, lowering himself into a chair and studying the senior through half-closed eyes. "I heard your phone jingle, I heard the sound of your voice talking over the wire, and I heard you when you left—only I couldn't be sure it was you until I came across the hall and investigated your quarters. I've been waiting and, of course, wondering. What's the matter with your face?"

Patterson dropped the overcoat on the bed and peered into a glass. There was a scratch at the corner of his eye, and a little trickle of red had discolored his cheek. Possibly he had scratched his forehead getting through the window, or one of Fortescue's friends may have struck him a glancing blow and broken the skin with a ring. It was nothing serious. Patterson had not been aware of the scratch until that moment.

"Hardly worth mentioning, Wharton," said Patterson, dampening a towel and wiping his face.

"I'm the only one that knows about this," the head coach went on, "and there's no use saying anything to Corey—he's got enough on his mind. Something personal, I take it?"

"Very personal," returned Patterson.

"Then that part of it is none of my put-in; it's the game to-morrow that interests me. You know how evenly balanced the opposing elevens are and that a fly's weight in the scales for or against may spell victory or defeat for Walthall. You wouldn't call that 'hardly worth mentioning,' would you, Patterson?"

"No."

"Then you get what I mean. Breaking orders for a moonlight stroll with your girl on the night before the big game is no way to make medicine for Walthall."

Patterson grinned. "Nothing like that, Wharton," he said earnestly. "Just take my word for it that this little fox pass of mine hasn't caused me to molt so much as a feather. To-morrow I play

my last game for Walthall, and you'll see it's the best of my gridiron career. I couldn't very well dodge that telephone call."

In some things the head coach was a martinet, but he was a keen judge of men and knew Patterson pretty well. "I'm willing to let it go at that," Wharton said, getting to his feet and moving toward the door, "and we'll call this midnight pasear of yours a closed incident and keep it between ourselves. You're not troubled about anything?"

"Not enough to put any crimps in my football work."

"That's all I want to know. Good night."

Wharton left, and Patterson heard the door close across the hall. Moving to the window, Patterson looked out. The fire fighters were evidently on the job, and the glow in the south was slowly fading.

"Wharton could have landed on me hard," Patterson was telling himself, "but he's a good sport and knows I wouldn't lie to him."

It was no secret at Walthall that Patterson, and not Corey, had been Wharton's choice for captain of the Walthall varsity eleven. Patterson had declined the honor for a quixotic reason: Because of personal traits that reacted against his brilliant football prowess and skill, Jerry Fortescue had failed to land the captaincy of the Brighton eleven.

For Patterson to let himself be advanced would have been to break an uncanny parallel in the fortunes of the two cousins and for Patterson to stand higher in the favor of Judge Briscoe. It was an absurd reason for declining preferment—to any one who did not know the secret desires of Patterson and the deep yearning he had to patch up his differences with Fortescue.

What had been the result of that self-denial? Fortescue had lured him abroad at midnight in an attempt to secure "personal satisfaction" for fancied injuries.

"Oh, shoot!" grunted Patterson disgustedly, turning away from the window. "It's getting along toward one, and Wharton will be over again if I don't douse the glim and hit the hay. Jerry, you're certainly a conundrum!"

He threw the light overcoat from the bed into a chair. As he did so, something dropped out of the inner pocket of the coat and fluttered to the floor. Patterson was not in the habit of carrying loose papers in his overcoat pockets, and he was struck with surprise.

His surprise grew when he picked up the fallen paper and found it to be a folded document, beautifully engraved on the outer fold and carrying a number in red figures. "Perrigord Light & Power Company, First and Refunding Five Per Cent Gold Bond," he read, and slumped down on the edge of the bed in consternation.

He gasped, rubbed his eyes, and gave the bond more detailed consideration. It was a thousand-dollar bond with two pages of attached coupons, each coupon calling for twenty-five dollars semi-annually. Patterson's temper flamed.

"The frame-up ran deeper than I imagined," was his first thought, the thought that sent his wrath to boiling point; "some of those crooked undergrads slipped that into my coat in the barn when I——"

Then he had a hunch that caused him to leap from the bed to the chair and pick up the light overcoat. It was a gray coat, but not his own. In the hurry and confusion in the barn, during his getaway he had taken Fortescue's coat by mistake. This bond had been in the pocket of the coat.

Were there any more bonds in the coat? Patterson looked, but found no more bonds—and nothing else save a pair of pigskin gloves. Wide-eyed and staring, Patterson snatched the afternoon newspaper from the floor and noted the number of the stolen bonds. "A 1612" was the number of this one that had dropped from Fortescue's coat, and it was plainly one of the five missing from the judge's safe.

"Jerry," thought Patterson, his rage all gone and pity taking its place, "I never thought you'd turn out a thief! Stealing—from Uncle Amos!"

The bachelor uncle, wealthy and eccentric, had only Patterson and Fortescue as his next of kin. It was known that the judge was watching his two nephews like a cat at a mousehole, determined that

his heir should be the one most worthy to inherit.

During the last two years Fortescue's wildness had given Patterson all the chance in the world to carry tales and set the judge against Fortescue. Patterson, however, did not carry tales; and he was not counting on Judge Briscoe's money to help him on in the world, preferring rather to stand on his own feet and make his way with his own hands. Fortescue was different, but the difference was only of two years' standing. He suspected Patterson of trying to undermine him in an attempt to get solid with the judge.

Patterson had now a real problem on his hands. It had struck him suddenly, dazingly, right between the eyes with the discovery of the stolen bond in the pocket of Fortescue's overcoat. Had Patterson been the man Fortescue believed him to be, he would have replaced the bond in the overcoat pocket and taken the whole convincing evidence to Judge Briscoe.

No such thought entered Patterson's head, however. The question he was turning about in his stricken mind was this: "What can I do to get Jerry out of this? He needed money for something or other—he admitted it to-night—and last Saturday evening the judge called him to Walthall, jumped on him hard, and cut his allowance in half. Jerry evened the score by raiding the judge's safe and—and——"

The enormity of that proceeding nearly floored Patterson. It was hard to imagine such a terrible lapse on Fortescue's part. Then, through the black clouds, there broke a gleam of hope. "Jerry," Patterson reasoned eagerly, "wasn't himself; he hasn't been himself for two years. He isn't accountable for what he did to-night, nor for rifling the judge's safe and taking those bonds—if he really did do that. It's up to me to stand by him; but what in thunder am I going to do?"

He held the incriminating evidence, and it was loaded with dynamite. His nerves were all in a quiver as he stood staring wildly from the coat in the chair to the bond in his hand. "This won't do," he muttered, pushing the tumbled black hair back from his brows with a nervous hand; "this thing will have to wait until after

the game to-morrow. I've got to cool off and settle down and tackle this problem when I'm free of other responsibilities.

"To spring it before Walthall meets Brighton would be to kill off one of the best backs Brighton ever had. No; it wouldn't do. Whatever action I take on that stolen bond has got to be postponed."

He folded Fortescue's coat and stowed it away in the empty drawer of a dresser; as for the bond itself, he hesitated between the battered old satchel he had brought from Walthall and the cheap suit case that contained his football gear.

An unregistered coupon bond passes from hand to hand like so much cash, unless stolen and its number blacklisted. Hiding a thousand dollars safely was a proceeding altogether novel for Hale Patterson, for his father's estate was barely large enough to see him through college—and he was nearly at the end of both his college course and his money.

"Hang it, this will do!" he muttered. He opened the satchel, removed a laundered shirt that he was saving for the dress-up occasion following the game, and stuffed the bond neatly under the bosom. Then he replaced the shirt in the satchel and went to bed.

It was lucky for Chug Patterson that he was hard as nails and able to throw off his troubles and problems; nevertheless, a clock in some tower boomed the hour of three in the morning before he could get Jerry Fortescue out of his mind and go to sleep.

CHAPTER III.

COMPLEX AND PUZZLING.

AT his home, Judge Briscoe was entertaining his old friend, Colonel Wade, and the colonel's friend, Professor Artemus Folsom. The professor was a noted psychologist, and the colonel had persuaded the judge to have this particular interview.

The judge leaned forward to uncover a humidior on the study table. "Smoke?" he suggested. "Help yourselves, gentlemen."

The judge and the colonel took cigars, but the professor fished a long-stemmed

holder from his pocket and fitted a cigarette into the end of it.

Folsom had a bald head and a long face and two probing black eyes back of his bifocal glasses. "I am very much interested in this matter, judge," he said, "just from the little Wade has already told me. Suppose you start at the beginning and outline the matter just as briefly as you can, without leaving out anything which you consider important."

The judge was a fine old type of the elderly, retired jurist—bushy-browed, white-haired, authoritative, a hard man in dealing with wrong, but kindly toward everything that was right or that approached the right. He studied the smoking tip of his cigar for a moment, then leaned back and began.

"It's a queer case of parallel fortunes, professor, and of two lives running in different channels with each cutting out astonishingly similar features. I have put that badly, but it's the best I can do, and I'll try and make myself plain.

"I had two sisters," he went on. "They married, and each had a son and no other children. The boys grew up, their parents passed on, and I was let in for the usual responsibility of a sole surviving relative. I have done and am still trying to do my best, but some things have turned up that are mighty puzzling to a man whose habit it is to build his mental processes on the law and the evidence. The sort of law I'm familiar with doesn't seem to apply at all; and my court experiences with alienists—you'll pardon me, I'm sure—hasn't given me a very high opinion of the ordinary mind expert."

Folsom's eyes twinkled behind his glasses, and a shadowy smile twisted at his thin lips. "I get you," he said affably. "For every alienist testifying for the defense, the prosecution produces another to offset the testimony. Pray go on, for I'm not thin-skinned."

"The judge is an old hard shell," put in Wade genially, "but his intentions are always excellent."

"My two nephews," the judge continued, "are Hale Patterson and Jerry Fortescue. They are of the same age and were apparently of the same mental equipment and accomplishments—up to

about two years ago. Just average young men, you understand, doing the average things and getting along in the average way. Straight as a die, and more like brothers than mere cousins—that is, up to about two years ago.

"Naturally, these young men are trying to please me. They are the next of kin of a rich uncle," said Briscoe dryly, "so I guess you understand when I say that naturally they are trying to cut their cloth according to my pattern. Fortescue seems a little more desirous of pleasing me than Patterson does—just a shade. Both boys are poor. I give Fortescue an allowance; I'd do the same for Patterson if he'd let me, but he won't.

"The boys entered prep school at the same time, though going to different schools. Knowing I'm a football fan, they began trying for football honors. Patterson had the best of Fortescue there; for, although slow in his studies, Patterson was fast and keen with the pigskin. They went to different colleges, Patterson to his father's Alma Mater here in Walthall, and Fortescue to his father's university at Brighton.

"In their freshman years, both tried for the football teams. Patterson made his freshman eleven, but Fortescue fell down—he was plucky, but he couldn't make it. The similarity between the fortunes of the two is emphasized by a difference in personal appearance, for Fortescue is a handsome lad, and Patterson is big and plain and freckled. It's only human, I suppose, but I have inclined more to Fortescue than to Patterson.

"Well, there came a remarkable change in Fortescue during his sophomore year," the judge continued. "He was pitched on his head in a football try-out and lay unconscious for three straight hours. I was told that he came close to having concussion of the brain. Fortunately, he missed that; but while he was wandering in the wilderness of what the doctors called a 'state of coma,' he seems to have picked up a number of things that have made him a problem and a wonder to me ever since.

"The day following his injury, Fortescue was back on the football field again; and—here's the big point—his

brilliant tackling, punting, and work with the ball won him a try-out in the back field of his varsity eleven—a position which he cinched by some of the finest and speediest work on the gridiron that Brighton ever witnessed. How would you account for that, professor? One day a dub at football and the next day a star! Could a thing like that be picked up in the subconscious realms?"

"I want to know more," said Folsom, "before I commit myself. Were there any other character changes resulting from that state of coma?"

"Well, I should say so!" The judge whiffed at his cigar, discovered the fire had died in it, and lighted it again. "Fortescue seemed to have become completely transformed. From an indifferent student barely keeping up with class requirements, he stepped at once, apparently with no effort at all, to the head of his classes. The professors were amazed, and the dean himself was astounded. But there was the fact, and it spoke for itself."

"Anything else?" asked Folsom.

"I haven't begun to tell it! Whereas before he was staid and solid and reliable, he soon developed a fondness for poker parties and hops and grew a bit wild. He tried to have his allowance increased, but I wouldn't come across. If what I hear is true, he was as brilliant at poker as at everything else, and I guess he pieced out his allowance with his winnings.

"He took to cigarettes, things that, in his normal condition, he couldn't bear; and even when in training he'd have his fags on the sly. But nothing he did, or does, seems to interfere with his astonishing success as student or as an athlete. Remarkable, eh?"

The professor merely shook his head, as though he was dragging from the depths of his psychic experiences something that did not look at all good.

"Both Fortescue and Patterson are now in their senior years; both play in the back field on their respective varsity elevens; and both are stars at the game," went on the judge. "Fortescue easily led his crowd for the captaincy of the eleven, but his training lapses and his irresponsible behavior caused him to be turned down. The captain of a football team

ought to be an exemplar of all the football virtues."

"What about Patterson all this time?" inquired Folsom.

The judge winced. "Patterson rather disgusted me," he answered. "His eleven wanted him for captain, but he wouldn't have it."

Folsom chuckled. "Why not?" he queried.

"For the most absurd reason you can imagine. You see, ever since Fortescue stepped across the border line of mystery for three hours and came back loaded with ability and peccadilloes, he has had no use at all for his cousin, Hale Patterson. He considers Patterson his rival in about everything that makes life and college worth while. And Patterson's dependability and honest character does a lot to feed Fortescue's grouch. My two nephews don't get along at all.

"As I said, they used to be like brothers, but now they're at daggers drawn. And Patterson takes it hard. He wants to be friends with his cousin; and he figured, near as I can size it up, that if he allowed himself to become captain of his eleven when Fortescue had failed to make the grade over at Brighton, there'd be another reason for Fortescue's fool hostility. I've certainly been out of patience with Patterson."

"Pardon me, judge, but you shouldn't have been," said the professor mildly. "You ought to have admired Patterson for his self-denial in such a cause."

"That highfalutin sentiment is too much for me," growled the judge. "When a young man can get ahead on his own merits, he's a fool if he doesn't. But declining to be captain of his eleven didn't help Patterson any with Fortescue. I suppose Fortescue wouldn't give Patterson any credit if he knew the real reason."

"I suppose not," agreed Folsom; "Fortescue isn't capable of it. Patterson, I suppose," he went on casually, "keeps you fully informed of all Fortescue's peccadilloes, as you call them?"

"He does not! I suppose he has heard a lot from Brighton that escapes me, but not a peep out of Patterson. I got Patterson here last Saturday evening and tried to pump him, but all he had for

his cousin was a good word. He hadn't been gone from the house for fifteen minutes when Fortescue blew in to spend the night.

"He heard Patterson had just left, and he landed on his cousin so hard that I gave Fortescue a testimonial of my approval by cutting his allowance in two—and just when he wanted me to double it. Well, after that I thought he wouldn't stay all night; but he did. And that's when something happened—or when I think it happened. Something really important.

"I had just discharged a crooked secretary. This secretary knew the combination of my safe over there"—the judge indicated his strong box in a corner of the study—"and I got a man in to change the combination. The man left the figures of the new combination on a slip on this desk, and I forgot all about them.

"I talked with Fortescue last Saturday night in this room, and he was close enough to the desk to read the combination numbers on the slip—if he cared to. Fortescue left the house next morning for Brighton; and Monday, when I looked through the safe, five one-thousand-dollar coupon bonds were missing."

"And you think——"

"What you've got in mind? I can't, and I won't!" declared the judge. "As for that, the slip with the new numbers lay on the desk a little while before I talked with Fortescue. Patterson was able to see them, too. What's more, while Patterson was here I had a caller and had to leave him alone in this study for about ten minutes. Do you suppose for a minute that I'd entertain any suspicion of Patterson? No more than I would of Fortescue. It's that secretary I'm suspecting."

"But if you had changed the combination——"

"I know, but he might have got wise somehow. I've put a detective on the job—one of the sort that will go anywhere and do anything to get a guilty plotter. It isn't the loss of the money, so much as letting somebody make a play of that sort and get away with it."

"That's the judge complex," observed Folsom, "expending its psychic energy along habitual channels."

"I don't care what sort of a complex it is," fumed the judge, "when the thief is found he'll take his medicine—and it will be a bitter dose!"

"Well, to get back to our mutttons," said Folsom, "we'll consider Fortescue. When he stepped out for three hours in his sophomore year, he came back with a case of megalomania. The grandiose appealed to him. He had picked up the confidence he lacked and set off a dormant complex—with brilliant results. He was always a football player and a bright student, but didn't think so.

"When his psychic energy turned powerfully into those channels, dreams became a *fait accompli*. Other complexes not so pleasant are also exploding in action. His enmity for Patterson, for instance, was always dormant in him; and so, too, was the fondness for poker and for other escapades. He acquired the nerve and the confidence to pull them off.

"And he is capable, if I have this right, of doing something really reprehensible—for which he should not be blamed altogether. The psychic self, judge, is a wonderful and baffling piece of machinery, especially in the young. Before I go on record, I should like to see these two young men in action. The motor expressions have much to do with the release of psychic energy and——"

The judge tossed his hands, and the colonel laughed.

"I've got three tickets to the game this afternoon, professor," the judge broke in. "Wade told me he thought you would desire to see the lads in action, and I decided the game would bring them together for study."

"Excellent!" declared Folsom.

A small motor car had dashed up to the judge's door, and a caller was announced. The judge excused himself.

"Patterson," remarked the colonel to the professor, when they were left alone, "is worth a dozen Fortescues—if the judge could only see it."

"Looking at it from here, colonel," said Folsom, "I'm tempted to agree with you. That is, Patterson is worth a dozen of the present Fortescues. What Fortescue was, before his complexes got jarred by that smash on the head, might give the problem another meaning."

The judge was gone for perhaps fifteen minutes. When he returned, his face was severe and clouded with trouble. At his heels walked a slender, ratlike man with a hatchet face and a gumshoe step.

"Gentlemen," announced the judge, "I have just had a terrific revelation, and it has nearly floored me. I presume it is something to be kept to myself, but Wade is my best friend and you, professor, are entitled to the information. This gentleman," he indicated the caller who had accompanied him, "is Mr. James Bogart, otherwise known as the 'Ferret.' Mr. Bogart—Professor Folsom and Colonel Wade. Mr. Bogart," the judge explained, "is the detective I have employed with my private means on this bond case."

"Easy pickin's," said Bogart, sidling over to the table and helping himself to a cigar. "The judge knew his stuff when he got me."

"He has found the thief," went on the judge, "and it wasn't my crooked secretary at all."

"I was wise to that from the start," commented Bogart, striking a match.

"There's one of the stolen bonds," said the judge, dropping the bond on the table much as though it were a rattlesnake. "Tell these gentlemen where you found it, Bogart."

"Sure thing, if that's what you want. It's the way with me to get a slant on a job right from the first," he expounded, "that's the reason I run down so many that fool the others. It wasn't the secretary, I says to myself when the judge batted this case up to me, and it wasn't nobody around the premises belongin' to the judge's ménage, I thinks, but it was either Fortescue or Patterson."

"I picked on Patterson. 'Still waters,' as the sayin' is, 'runs deep.' Early this forenoon I gets my chance to look through Patterson's hotel room while him and his gang is out for signal practice. And what do I find tucked away in the bosom of a white shirt in his grip? That bond!"

"Patterson's grip!" gasped Wade.

Folsom made no comment, but he looked puzzled.

"And Patterson pays for his deviltry!" fumed the judge, bringing his fist down on the desk. "I'll not spare him any

more than I would a stranger. We'll wait till after the game and not bother him with this and spoil his playing. You can study both men, Folsom, in the light of what Bogart has discovered." The judge sighed heavily. "I'd give ten thousand dollars out of my own pocket rather than have had this happened. Hale Patterson, the boy I——" The judge choked and bit off his words.

"Ain't life the darndest thing?" philosophised Bogart, the Ferret. "I didn't dare to tell the judge I was after Patterson, but I knowed I had the right slant. Some says it's a gift. Mebby it is, but that's the way I work."

"The ego complex causes many a man to come a cropper, Mr. Bogart," Folsom suggested.

"Huh? Oh, I get you. So that's what ails Patterson, eh?"

CHAPTER IV.

DEMANDING AN EXCHANGE.

FOR several days Wharton had been easing up on the work demanded of the Walthall varsity eleven. Every player was fit, and every one of his reserve contingent was in A-1 condition. "Pop" Mulligan, the trainer, and Corey, the captain, had both assured Wharton of this, but the head coach never took anybody's word regarding the morale and physical condition of the team; he got his facts first-hand, and he was well pleased and thoroughly satisfied.

One thing alone annoyed Wharton, and that was the foolish lionizing of the varsity players by Walthall fans, who were as exuberant as they were irresponsible. Already the Balmoral Hotel, headquarters of the visiting players, was crowded with rooters for the Blue and White.

They had come early, and most of them were under the impression that it was necessary to crown their warriors with oral garlands continually in order to keep up their confidence. It was more to get his men away from the enthusiastic fans than for anything else that Wharton led them out to the big Brighton stadium immediately after breakfast.

As the visiting eleven were playing on the enemy's ground they were at some

slight disadvantage; but they had beaten Brighton on Brighton's home field before, and they were confident they would do it again. Brighton had returned the compliment by beating Walthall on the Walthall grounds. Both wins had been made by the closest of scores, and it was evident that this season's game would fall to the victor by a slender margin—and Walthall was convinced that the Blue and White would claim that margin after the dust of the fray had settled.

If confidence is really half of any battle, then the Walthall victory was already half won; but Wharton knew well the capacity of hero worshipers to load a team with overconfidence, and that was the thing against which the coach wanted to guard.

The visitors had the stadium all to themselves and were put through a light signal drill; later, in the club house, Wharton gathered all his men around him and talked straight to the point.

"You men are going to win, this afternoon," he said; "make no doubt about that. But this eleven has the hardest fight on its hands it ever had before—make no doubt about that, either. The game will only be cinched by each man being on his toes, pulling on all his moral fiber as well as on his physical powers. They say that pride goes before a fall; and I want to remind you that pride, in some cases, is only another name for overconfidence.

"Most of the old grads who are here to see their favorite college clean-up on a hard-fighting foe understand what I mean," the coach went on. "You won't find them getting foolish when any player of this eleven happens to pass through the lobby of the Balmoral. They'll do their cheering at the game, and they'll put the right men on pedestals after the game is over. It's only the wrong-headed, unthinking fan that spills his enthusiasm in a preliminary outburst—and then sneaks home as mute as a discredited sphinx when the score board shows the winning to have been on the wrong side.

"Make no mistake, fellows! I'm counting on you, I believe in you, and I know the glory of old Walthall is safe in your hands. You are the best eleven the Blue and White has had in a dozen

years. That is absolutely true, and it's as necessary as it is true, for the Brighton crowd is far and away the gamest aggregation of fighters the Red and White ever put on a football field.

"But don't let the fans hamper you with the idea that you are invincible and have a walk-away," he continued. "Just feel in your bones that you are invincible—don't get the conviction from hearsay, but dig it up out of your own brawn and spirit—and I'll confidently await the outcome. Now get back to the hotel and keep clear of the lobby."

Wharton had a way of saying things that went home. The Waltham men cheered, then grew thoughtful, and when they trailed away toward the hotel, their mood was reserved, but none the less determined.

It was only a short, brisk walk from the athletic field to the Balmoral; and Patterson, separating himself from his teammates, detoured alone around the south side of the inclosure to secure a passing glance at the blackened, water-soaked ruins of the old barn.

The fire department had done its work well. The building had been practically demolished. One rear wall and a side wall remained standing, and what had been the floor of the barn was now littered with charred debris. Little pools of muddy water could be seen here and there, slowly seeping away.

Patterson, striding along the road, was thoughtful, like the rest of his teammates, but there was more on his mind than had been aroused by the crisp talk of the head coach. The ruins of the flame-wrecked barn brought him poignant reminders of Fortescue's foolishness. Then, startled, he saw the object of his gloomy thoughts emerge from behind a section of half-wrecked wall.

"I say, Chug!"

Patterson halted and waited for his cousin to come close.

Fortescue's handsome face was clouded with something that looked like worry. "Looking over the scene of the late unpleasantness?" he asked mockingly.

"Well, yes; you might call it that," replied Patterson, probing his cousin with a keen glance. "Our crowd was over at the stadium, and I made a detour on the

way back to the hotel just to see what was left of that old shack."

"Didn't know but you might be looking for a lost overcoat," went on Fortescue. "Well, don't worry. I took your coat away, thinking it was mine. I suppose my own coat was wiped out with the barn. I've been poking around in the ruins to see if I could find it—or what was left of it."

"If it will ease your mind any, Jerry, I'll tell you that I made the same mistake. I picked up your overcoat and have it at the hotel."

Fortescue breathed hard and clamped his jaws. His eyes glittered as they rested on his cousin's face. "Sure it was a mistake, Chug?" he asked harshly.

"Why not? If you made off with my coat, why isn't it reasonable to suppose that I might make off with yours? There was some hurry and confusion, if you will remember," Patterson added significantly.

"We'll let it go at that," growled Fortescue. "I'll get your coat and bring it to the hotel; and in about fifteen minutes, you'll meet me in the lobby and make an exchange. I want my coat just as you got it," he finished, after a moment.

Patterson was in a quandary. He hid his perplexity by turning away with the words: "All right, Jerry, I'll bring your coat down to the lobby."

Then Patterson hurried on, revolving in his mind a problem which he had determined to brush aside until after the game. He knew one of the stolen bonds had been in Fortescue's possession. Was that knowledge sufficient? Should the bond be returned to Fortescue or directly to Judge Briscoe?

Naturally there was only one right answer to that. The bond belonged to the judge, and the judge ought to have it. But how could the bond be returned to the judge without plunging Fortescue into a maze of damning circumstances? If he did that, Patterson would be the one to bring about his cousin's ruin.

Every step of the way back to the hotel, Patterson was turning the situation over in his mind. He knew Judge Briscoe's sternness and was certain that the judge would not spare Fortescue. Patterson's desire to shield his cousin bat-

tled with his plain duty. He tried to convince himself that returning the bond to Fortescue, under a promise from Fortescue that he would himself restore the bond to the judge, was the easiest way out of the dilemma.

Where were the other four bonds? Could Fortescue be depended on to keep a promise? Would he return the one bond if he had already managed to realize something on the other four?

CHAPTER V.

STRAIGHT FOR THE JAW.

THE strain of a decision in the matter was a terrific one for Patterson. If he did the right thing, then the breach between himself and his cousin would be widened beyond all repair. If he took chances and wrung from Fortescue a promise to do the right thing, and the promise was not kept, then Patterson himself would have to go to the judge and make his revelation—and without the bond as evidence to back up his statements.

Patterson was still undecided as to what he ought to do as, evading the lobby, he regained the hotel by the side door. He took the overcoat out of the bureau drawer in his room. He had folded it neatly, he remembered, when he put it away; it was folded now, but not, it seemed to him, as he had done it. Still, he had been excited when he stowed the coat away in the drawer, and possibly he was not remembering the small incident correctly.

Laying the coat over the back of a chair, he got his satchel and looked for the bond. Then he was really startled, for the bond was not under the bosom of the freshly laundered shirt, where he had left it. He broke the band the laundry had pinned about the shirt and shook the garment feverishly, but without result. In a panic, he dumped the contents of the satchel out on the floor. There was no trace of the missing bond.

Patterson slumped into a chair. His forehead was beaded with drops of perspiration, and his wits were in a sad jumble. By a fierce effort he calmed himself and tried to think to some purpose. The coat, he felt sure now, had been in some-

body's hands since he had folded it and put in the dresser drawer. Possibly the maid who had made up the room that morning— He discarded that theory as soon as it was formed. Some one had been in the room and made a search. Some one! Who?

"This is no time for me to be in such a taking!" Patterson told himself. "I've got to shelve the mystery until after the game—then I can plunge into it and maybe wrestle it to a fall. I'll give Jerry his coat, and I'll keep quiet about the missing bond. All the worry is up to him, anyhow."

He got to his feet, shook back his shoulders, picked up the light overcoat, and left the room.

The hotel lobby was crowded with enthusiastic Blue and White rooters. "Whoop!" they yelled. "Here's our king-pin now! Patterson, you old skater! Chug, chug, chug-chug-chug! 'Rah for Patterson!"

The half back disentangled himself from the frenzied mob that quickly surrounded him, pleading business of importance. It was a hard job to get clear of the press, but Patterson at last succeeded and met Fortescue in one corner of the big room.

"Here's your coat," said Fortescue, and handed it over and snatched his own property. "There's a lot of kick to the Blue and White," he remarked, running one hand into the breast pocket of the coat, "and the Balmoral is no place for one of the Brighton players. Your men are wise to do their crowing now, and not wait until after— Say," broke off Fortescue with an ugly gleam in his eyes, "I said I wanted this coat just as it was, Patterson! You're holding out on me. Come across!"

"Holding out—what?"

Fortescue's answer to that was a straight-arm punch directed at his cousin's jaw. Patterson twisted to one side, and the fist flashed across his shoulder. Fortescue had put so much steam behind his blow that he pitched forward against his cousin; the latter threw him back, but did not strike at him.

"You low-down cur!" snarled Fortescue, and whirled to make another attack.

He was caught and held by some of the Walthall rooters.

"Who said the Brighton crowd were good sports?" yelled a voice wildly. "They're trying to knock out our best half back and cripple our team!"

"You're wrong!" protested Patterson. "Let him alone—he's my cousin—it's all right. Let him go, I tell you! No harm has been done."

A hand dropped on Patterson's shoulder, and he looked around to see Wharton.

"Get out of this, Chug," ordered the head coach. "I told all our men to keep clear of the lobby. No," he insisted, pulling Patterson toward the wide stairway; "if you want to be in the line-up this afternoon, do as I tell you."

That was enough for Patterson. He took a grip on himself, reached the stairs, and climbed to the second floor without so much as a backward look. Certainly he was having a deuce of a time trying to do the right thing, he told himself grimly. Later, when Wharton came to his room seeking an explanation, his perplexities were doubled.

"You know how it has been for two years between Jerry and me, Wharton," he said. "My cousin has it in for me, that's all."

"Why did you meet him in the lobby?"

"He asked me to. I had his overcoat and he had mine, coach—a mistake that was made last night. We—we met to exchange coats, that's all."

"Why did he try to mix it with you?" demanded the troubled Wharton.

Even now the truth, the bald, damning truth, could not be revealed. To clear himself by ruining his cousin was not to be thought of—according to the Patterson standard of conduct. "That's personal, Wharton, and I can't go into it—even to you."

Wharton took a turn up and down the room with his head bowed in thought. "Is this senseless animosity to be kept up on the field this afternoon?" he demanded. "Are you and Fortescue going to carry your personal differences into a good, clean game of football? If that's the case, Patterson, badly as we need you, I'll keep you on the side lines."

"So far as I'm concerned, coach," de-

clared Patterson, meeting the coach's look squarely, "when the whistle blows, I'll forget everything but my work for the varsity. If any one's disqualified, it won't be me."

"I believe in you, as I've said all along," remarked Wharton after a thoughtful pause, "and I'm going to back my belief in you to the limit. Your cousin seems to be a hot-tempered fool, and if there are any differences between you, I'll gamble the right is on your side. Keep your own counsel if that's the way you're minded—and your temper. That's my last word."

"You can bank on my keeping my temper," said Patterson, trying to grin. "I've had to do that for about two years, in the matter of my cousin, and it's got to be something of a habit."

CHAPTER VI.

READY TO GO.

AT the stadium, Judge Briscoe, Professor Folsom, and Colonel Wade got out of the judge's motor car shortly after the rival elevens had gone to their dressing rooms. There was a great crowd milling around the gates, and the uproar and confusion were tremendous. The undergrads from both colleges were divided in two partisan groups, and each group was trying to outdo the other in noisy demonstrations.

Walthall had sent over the biggest delegation of rooters that had ever tagged the Blue and White into enemy territory; but, of course, Brighton, playing at home, greatly outnumbered the invading hosts. For all that, however, the quality of Walthall enthusiasm was such that the Blue and White more than held its own in the wild clamor.

This was the sort of thing that Judge Briscoe thoroughly enjoyed. Hooking arms with his friends, he pulled them through the madly heaving press. "We'll invade the Brighton training quarters," he announced, "and say howdy to young Fortescue. I always make it a point to do that when Jerry's in the line-up."

"That hardly seems right, judge," protested Wade. "These are the minutes just before the game, the coaches are probably giving their last instructions to

the men, and we'll certainly be butting in at the wrong time."

"Objection overruled," said the judge; "everybody knows me, and my little visits previous to a big game are as welcome as the flowers in spring. I'm always expected, and if I didn't say hello to Jerry he'd take it amiss. Besides, I want the professor to get a close-up of the boy before the doings."

Certainly the judge seemed to be a favored person, in spite of the fact that he hailed from Walthall. Coaches, trainers, and players welcomed him cordially and brought him at last to a bench where Fortescue, flat on his back and stripped to the waist, was receiving the careful attentions of a rubber.

"Say, unk," cried Fortescue, sitting up on the bench and reaching out his hand, "this is fine of you! Are you wishing me luck against Walthall?"

"Of course I'm wishing you luck, Jerry," said the judge, giving the extended hand a cordial shake; "a good, clean game—and let the best side win; that's the way I always stack up." He turned to his companions. "I don't have to introduce Wade, but this gentleman is Professor Folsom, and you've never met him before."

Fortescue swept his blue-gray eyes over the stranger; and he must have been surprised at the keenness with which the stranger met his glance. Folsom took the young man's hand when Wade had released it.

"Any friend of my uncle's is a friend of mine," Fortescue remarked with a sunny smile. "Glad to know you, professor."

"We're expecting a regular game this afternoon," said Folsom.

"You'll get it. Keep your eye on the big steamboat in the opposing back field." Fortescue's smile faded, and an ugly gleam rose in his eyes. "To-day's the day we show up the muckers," he added, "and no guilty man is going to escape."

The judge frowned and started to say something, but bit the words short. "Play as you usually play, Jerry," he went on, after a pause, "and I'll be yelling for Brighton as much as I do for Walthall. Best o' luck, nephew." He turned away and left the training quarters. "You

never saw a finer specimen of a college athlete, did you, professor?" he inquired.

"Physically, no," answered Folsom thoughtfully; "but it's the mental make-up that interests me—the psychic impulses and their conations."

"Well, how do you size up Fortescue from that angle?"

The professor laughed. "I won't commit myself until I see him in action, judge," he returned. "For purposes of comparison, now, I'd like a hand shake and two or three words with Patterson."

"That will come, Folsom," spoke up the colonel; "the judge never plays favorites. If he calls on one nephew, he makes it a point to call on the other."

The judge clamped his jaws. "I'm not calling on Patterson until after the game," he growled. "In the light of Bogart's recent discoveries, Wade, it won't do."

The colonel's face went blank. "Then you are playing a favorite this afternoon, Briscoe?" he inquired. "I wouldn't let a mere report by Bogart make all that difference. There are always two sides to a story—and nobody ought to be more familiar with that fact than a judge."

"I'll not be two-faced with Patterson," said the judge obstinately. "If I saw him now, I'd say something about that bond. He's going into the game with a guilty conscience, and that's bad enough without letting him get wise about the evidence I have corralled. Take Folsom over to the Walthall quarters, Wade, then you two can join me in the stand."

"Unless you go along, judge, we'd better all stay away," put in Folsom. "If it has been your custom to see both your nephews before a game like this, the colonel would do more damage trying to explain your absence than the brief interview would be worth to me."

"All right," acquiesced the judge coolly; "that part of it is up to you. I've been fooled by Patterson long enough, and from now on he gets nothing more from me than what he has got coming."

"Correct, your honor," said Wade; "but, although I'm not a lawyer, I have a conviction that Patterson has not yet been downed. The law is clear enough, but the evidence is circumstantial and incomplete."

"It's complete enough for me," averred Briscoe doggedly. "Later in the day Patterson will have his chance to explain—if he can."

The Walthall players had their dressing rooms under the stands. Patterson was getting into his padded clothes when one of Pop Mulligan's corps of assistants brought him an item of news.

"Your uncle, the judge, has just come out of the Brighton quarters, Chug. He had a couple of old boys with him."

Patterson grinned. "I knew he'd be here, Terry," he remarked. "You couldn't keep him away from this game with handcuffs and leg irons. He's been over in the other camp giving my cousin the glad hand. He'll be here in a minute, for he never fails to pass around the good wishes before a game. I got the three tickets for him and delivered them last Saturday. Keep an eye out for him, will you?"

The minutes passed, and the judge did not appear. Patterson, while he wondered, mingled with his teammates. Two bands, on opposite sides of the field, were mixing their crashing, defiant melodies. The tumult, the shouting, under the inspiration of the cheer leaders, was reaching a maximum. The Walthall players would hardly have been human if all that noise had not set their nerves tingling; but, as the big moment drew nearer, the men grew thoughtful.

Wharton gathered them about him for a last talk. He made it brief and snappy. Then, turning away with a nod to Corey, he finished: "All right; go to it!"

Still Patterson was wondering about the judge. Never before had the judge failed, when present at a game in which his nephews played, to make his preliminary visit and impartially express his good wishes. It had become a habit with him. Both Fortescue and Patterson had come to expect it as something almost as certain as the starter's whistle. This afternoon he had followed established precedent—but only so far as Fortescue was concerned.

"What's on your mind, Chug?" asked Corey, captain and quarter back.

Patterson smoothed the wrinkles between his brows and met Corey's question with a laugh. "Not a thing, old sport!"

There wasn't. The half back had re-adjusted himself to the needs of the moment. The unpleasant affair of the night, the mix-up in overcoats, the stolen bond so weirdly found and so inexplicably missing, the incident of the hotel lobby, and the failure of the judge to run true to form—all these perturbing events were dropped completely from Patterson's mind.

They were momentous matters, but altogether personal. The tocsin call of the varsity was for the best in every man championing the cause of the Blue and White; and Patterson had the happy faculty of being able to forget everything but the work and the responsibilities ahead of him.

Up in the stand, the judge occupied his favorite seat with the colonel and the professor flanking him on left and right. The rising tiers that edged the playing field were banks of gay color, Blue and White on one side and Red and White on the other. Like dervishes the cheerleaders disported themselves at the edges of the chalked turf, and the roaring yells for Walthall and Brighton mixed in leather-lunged cadences.

A wild bedlam of yells broke from the Brighton side as the Red and White eleven trotted out on the field, as game looking a lot of warriors as one would care to see. The substitutes made for the benches back of the side line, and the team began signal practice.

"There's Fortescue, professor," yelled the judge in Folsom's ear, pointing into the field. "Got him spotted?"

The professor nodded. With their stockings and sweaters ribbed red and white, and the big "B" flaring whitely on their breasts, the Brighton men would be easy to follow up and down the field. No less easy would it be to differentiate and keep track of the lithe figure playing at left half.

In an aggregation of players in which all were good, Fortescue impressed the on-looker as being a shade better than any of the rest. It was only a preliminary impression, however, to be tested by the real grind and shock of combat.

A roar from the Walthall side went up when the Blue and White players came into the field. Rising from their seats

the visiting rooters released a terrific noise which, they fondly calculated, would match the clamor recently raised in tribute of the opposing team.

"Which is Patterson?" Folsom demanded of the judge.

The judge indicated his nephew, and the professor concentrated upon the "Steamboat" he had been requested by Fortescue to watch. It was a solid human engine, but amazingly quick and sure in every movement during the brief practice period.

Folsom began making comparisons of the two opposing half backs. There was not much to be gained from that in the short warming-up session. Presently there fell the calm that precedes every storm, and Corey moved out from among his men to meet Ducane, captain and left end for Brighton.

A coin shimmered in the bright sunshine for an instant.

"Brighton wins the toss," muttered Wade.

"Do you believe in omens, colonel?" inquired the professor.

"Well, if I do, Folsom, my omen complex isn't working," was the answer. "Winning the toss-up doesn't mean much, anyhow. Brighton chooses the goal to windward."

"This isn't Brighton against Walthall," said a voice behind the judge, "it's Fortescue against Patterson. They hate each other like a pair of Kilkenny cats hung over a clothesline. They had a fight this morning in the hotel lobby, and if they don't come together again before this game is wound up, I'll miss my guess."

The judge turned to look at the speaker. He was not one of the college men, but he wore the Blue and White colors. Briscoe recognized him as a real-estate agent from Walthall.

"Do you mean to say, Harrington," the judge demanded, "that Patterson picked a fight with Fortescue, in the hotel?"

"Well, judge," returned Harrington sheepishly, "I didn't see you, and maybe I misspoke myself. It wasn't Patterson that started the row, near as I understand, but Fortescue. And the fight was stopped before it got started. Too bad those two lads have such a grouch at each other."

All this was news to the judge. He

facéd around grimly as the referee, with uplifted hand, claimed the attention of the two opposing teams. There came a word from each side, a word of readiness, and a shrill whistle gave the starting signal.

"Now they're off," muttered the judge, settling down in his seat.

Never before had he watched a game with such conflicting emotions as he was watching that one. Folsom might have explained that somewhere, down in his submerged depths, the judge had an uneasy feeling that he was not playing square with Patterson. Nevertheless there was the evidence, the circumstantial evidence, and the judge might squirm, but he could not get away from it.

CHAPTER VII.

PASSES AND PUNTS.

THERE had been no change in the final line-up, and both Walthall and Brighton were playing their regular men. The best football material each varsity had to offer had come to grips on the Brighton field that beautiful November afternoon. It was evident during the first few minutes of play that a condition prevailing for years on the gridiron had not altered in any degree: The opposing teams were so evenly matched that there was hardly a toss-up between them. Tactics differed, but unless something sensational in that line were uncovered later on by one side or the other, the strategy maintained an even balance.

The style of play of the different men was not hard to differentiate, and the methods of the two cousins were in striking contrast. Fortescue was the greyhound, the nimble dodger, flying like a streak toward the enemy's goal and too often overrunning his own interference; his work was brilliant—almost too spectacular, at times, and excusable only because of the ground it invariably gained. It was clear that the left half thirsted for distinction, and that the sweetest music in his ears was the oft-repeated yell: "Fortescue! Gets his cue! Follows through! Yea, bo, Fortescue!"

Patterson, on the other hand, was the cool and careful player. Starring himself was clearly the least of his ambitions, and

he was well content to turn a play into a part of the field where his teammates could handle it safely, rather than to take a chance singlehanded and run a risk of failure.

At times he seemed slow; at other times he was the plunger, the battering-ram, the ground gainer through the thick of the opposition; and yet, on occasion, he showed astonishing speed and an ability to flash around the ends as successfully as his fleet-footed cousin.

Patterson kicked off for Walthall, driving the ball deep into Red and White territory. Fortescue received it beautifully and ran it back twenty yards. The playing began with the two cousins in the spotlight. An attack through center gained three yards, and an attempted run around the end by Gordon, Brighton's right half, was nipped with the loss of a yard. Brighton punted, and the ball went out of bounds and was brought back on the fifty-yard line.

Patterson stormed right tackle for nine plunging yards, and Corey was held for neither a gain nor a loss; then Walthall's left half, Carter, was given his chance and made two through left end. Once more Corey was held in his tracks. The ball went to Brighton on a fumble on the Red and White's forty-yard line.

Walthall held for two downs, but Fortescue gained three around the end—and the three might have been thirty, but for Blue and White speed and good luck. Brighton punted. Patterson grabbed the pigskin out of the air, tucked it under his arm, and was away to the fifty-yard line.

For two downs the play was smothered by the Brighton crowd, and Patterson punted. From the twenty-yard line, Brighton gained three on a short pass; then, for two downs, Walthall braced and held. A long pass, beautifully executed, Fortescue to Frisbie, Brighton's quarter back, gained fifteen yards.

Then came the first casualty; and "Sandy" Blake, Walthall's left tackle, had to be taken out, and Al Carden went in for him.

Brighton gained five through center, and then tried a pass which was blocked by Patterson; another pass was blocked by the Walthall center, Summerfield, and Walthall took the oval into camp on a

fumble. From the thirty-yard line, Carter kicked to the enemy's forty-two-yard line; Brighton made a hard yard through center, picked up two yards more through a delayed pass maneuver, were held for the next down—and the quarter ended.

Neither side had scored; and neither side had even seriously threatened the other's goal. The old paradox of an irresistible force meeting an immovable body seemed to be exemplified, with no hint of an ultimate solution. So far there had been nothing but good clean football, with the teams evenly matched.

The ball was Brighton's on Brighton's thirty-eight-yard line when the whistle blew.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT FOR A CLEAN-UP.

WHILE Patterson sprawled on the turf during the intermission, relaxing every muscle, a disturbing thought came sneaking into his consciousness. Twice during the first quarter he had come abreast of that part of the stand where the judge, the colonel, and the professor had their seats. Flashing glimpses of his uncle, particularly at the moment when time had been called for Sandy Blake, had revealed to Patterson a grim, unresponsive face.

This suggested a mood so different from that usually exhibited by the judge at a football game that Patterson was in a quandary. Something had happened, surely, something that had kept the judge away from the Walthall quarters before the game and was now holding him mute—except when Fortescue made a fifteen-yard gain, or in some other manner distinguished himself. Uncle Amos could wave his hat and cheer the Brighton left half, but he had no similar tribute for the Walthall right half, although Carter's heave of the ball for eighty yards had brought him to his feet with a yell for the Blue and White.

"Something's wrong," suggested the sneaking, pestering thought to Chug Patterson. "The judge never acted like this before. Wonder if he has heard of that near row in the Balmoral lobby, thinks I'm responsible for it, and is showing his temper?"

Colonel Wade, however, pursued dif-

ferent tactics. Snatches of his enthusiasm drifted to the right half when he plunged through the opposing line for nine yards; and again, when Sandy Blake was taken out, Patterson got a cheer and an encouraging word from the colonel. If the judge had anything against his nephew, it was clear that the colonel had not.

The attitude of Professor Folsom was mildly surprising. Patterson had not met the psychology expert and knew nothing about him, but whenever he glanced at the long-faced gentleman he found himself the objective of the eyes behind the glasses. It was so now, during the intermission.

"A mighty queer trio of fans," Patterson told himself; "but I'd give something to know——"

He felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up to see Corey, his captain, bending over him.

"Good work, Chug!" said Corey. "How's the old Steamboat?"

"Never better, old top!" was the instant answer.

"Fine! We've all of us got to show the other side the best we've got in order to make a clean-up."

Again by a supreme effort of the will Patterson had pushed aside all his personal mysteries and disturbing problems. Once more he was one of the eleven cogs in a superb football machine.

Up in the stand, the judge, the colonel, and the professor had their heads together. Bedlam had broken loose all around them, and their submerged voices were for each other's ears alone.

"What do you think about it, so far?" the judge inquired of Folsom.

"Fifty-fifty, judge," was the answer. "It's a grueling test, and the team with the most endurance will finally send a man through for a touchdown."

"I was referring to Fortescue and Patterson," said the judge, showing a trace of annoyance. "Have you seen anything in Patterson that would indicate a guilty conscience?"

Folsom shook his head. "Nor in Fortescue, either; but when the pace begins to wear, the bars of repression may go down—then we can look for something really interesting and perhaps conclusive."

"Patterson," put in the colonel, "is as steady as a clock. He never misses a chance. If his mind were troubled at all, Briscoe, that would hardly be the case."

The judge scowled and chewed hard on an unlighted cigar. "Bogart is right about Patterson being a deep one," he commented; "but it seems to me, all the same, that he shows evidence of strain, of not being up to his usual playing form."

"Splash!" jeered the colonel. "Your imagination is playing hob with your judgment, Briscoe. I never saw Patterson play a better game than he is showing us this afternoon. He's as calm as a day in June, and not he but you are showing evidence of strain."

"I'll admit, Wade, that I'm disturbed," the judge returned, "but not to a degree that obscures my judgment."

"You're all for Fortescue and don't seem to see Patterson at all."

"I go the way of my honest convictions and rule with the evidence," declared the judge. "Patterson has looked in this direction twice, hungry for some sort of a rise out of me, I imagine."

"I shouldn't call it that, judge," Folsom put in; "the young fellow is merely puzzled. You give Fortescue an allowance, and you'd do the same for Patterson if he wanted you to. Evidently he's not hungry for any of your money."

"No?" The face of the judge clouded. "With that bond in his possession, Folsom, just how do you figure that he has no regard for my money?"

"He seems eager for just one thing—your approbation. Money has nothing to do with it. As for the bond, Patterson's plain desire to win your approval is his best defense against any suspicion of unfairness in dealing with you."

"That's where you alienists always get me buffaloe," the judge complained. "You take a very good black, make a psychological pass or two over it, and then have the nerve to say it is white. Ordinary common sense is the best standard to use in judging evidence; at least, I've always found it the most dependable."

"Hard reasoning, based on experience, has proved one thing to my perfect satisfaction: Sooner or later, every man with a guilty conscience is bound to betray

himself. What you referred to as 'the bars of repression' will go down, before this game is finished, and Patterson will go to pieces. A law of human nature, stronger than any written into man-made statutes, will take care of that."

Folsom laughed. "You're a good psychologist, after all," he said, "and we're meeting on common ground. If Patterson is guilty of wrongdoing, judge, then your attitude toward him this afternoon is cleverly designed to help bring on the break, if one comes. I believe I get your idea."

"I don't believe you do," returned Briscoe uncomfortably, "for I hadn't thought of such a thing."

"It wasn't necessary for you to think of it; some of our most telling actions are rooted in the sub——"

"Cut out that highbrow stuff," interposed the colonel; "the game's on again—here goes the second quarter."

The whistle blew; and Fortescue made a beautiful punt of fifty yards, the ball going out of bounds. It was brought back to Walthall's twenty-yard line.

"Eight—nineteen—fourteen—seven!" rang the shrill signal.

Carter made a yard through tackle. Then something happened. Patterson fell back to punt, but fumbled the ball and recovered it on the five-yard line; his next essay fell short, and the ball went into play on Walthall's twenty-yard line.

Something like dismay gripped the Blue and White rooters.

"He's going!" muttered the judge.

"A fluke!" stormed the colonel. "It's liable to happen to the best of 'em."

Professor Folsom smiled. "Overanxious, that's all," he commented; "it will pay us to watch Patterson closely during the next few minutes."

CHAPTER IX.

SIGNAL FROM THE STAND.

IT happened that Professor Folsom, in saying that Patterson was overanxious, had arrived at an incorrect conclusion. He discovered that for himself during the second quarter and revised his opinion.

Patterson was not overanxious. He had schooled himself when playing to do

his best and let anxiety go hang. Worrying over the outcome of an undertaking was like crossing a bridge of trouble before one got to it; and the surest way to manufacture trouble is to let the mind imagine it and begin to bridge it.

Patterson's bungling was caused by a shout, a passing glimpse of a face in the crowd, and another glimpse of Fortescue in the opposing back field. In time, the experience involved a fraction of a minute and expended itself in seconds and split-seconds; a disturbing thought followed in its train and was not put down until a certain amount of havoc had resulted.

"Fort!" a husky voice had boomed from the side line.

It was a peculiar voice, chinking itself into a sudden lull of the general clamor. Patterson shot a look in the direction from which the yell had come, and on the instant his eyes focused on a man who had risen from his seat and, in a crouching attitude, was directing his gaze at the football field. The man's face was forbidding, sinister, and filled with ugly menace; it stood out like a thing of evil against the rippling color of the Red and White side of the stadium.

Quick as thought Patterson's gaze rebounded from the crowded tiers of seats into the Brighton back field. There he saw Fortescue, half turned toward the scowling face, his knees sagging, his arms hanging limp, and his shoulders drooping. It was as though Fortescue had received a startling revelation, as disagreeable as it was unexpected. In a flash, however, he was himself again, or apparently himself, and thinking of nothing but the next move of the opposing team.

In itself this byplay was a small incident, a trifle in the onrush of more important events. Perhaps not more than half a dozen were aware that it had happened at all, so swiftly did it come and go. The alert, eagle-eyed Folsom missed it; and of the few who did observe it, only Patterson was impressed by it.

That voice and that face had exerted a passing but powerful influence on Fortescue. Why? The query rushed into Patterson's mind. Was there some connection between the man in the stand and that Perrigord bond?

This pestering thought caused Patterson to fall off in his work, because his mind momentarily was divided between his work and his sudden suspicion. He took a grip on himself after he had failed his varsity in the play consigned to his care. Hotly condemning his folly, from that moment he threw heart and soul into the game, determined at his next chance to retrieve himself.

It was Brighton's quarter, with Bill Frisbie, the Brighton quarter back, playing like a demon and shooting his backs savagely into the Walthall line. Two thirds of the play was in Blue and White territory, with Red and White furiously resolved on getting a touchdown before the end of the half.

After Patterson's poor punt, the ball went into play on Walthall's twenty-yard line. Gordon, right half for Brighton, failed to gain; a pass, Gordon to Brighton's right end, Collins, was incomplete. Here Walthall was penalized fifteen yards for interference. The play was pushing toward the Blue and White goal, and the stands were in a frenzy.

"Bright-on—fight on—touchdown—Bright-on!" clamored the Red and White rooters.

"Wall—wall—stone wall—Walthall—hold 'em!" begged the rooters on the other side of the stadium.

Frisbie lost a yard for Brighton through center; Bennett, Brighton's full back, failed to gain. An attempt to pass the ball was intercepted by Patterson, in a remarkably brilliant play, and then Patterson tore off six yards for the Blue and White in a bull-like rush; then, on his next try, he was overwhelmed and failed to gain. He punted to the thirty-five-yard line.

At this point, Brighton's right tackle was taken out, and O'Day was substituted. A Brighton pass, by Gordon, was incomplete; then Brighton passed to Fortescue for a six-yard gain—matching Patterson's recent gain for Walthall—another pass, right half to quarter back, failed to make good. Then O'Day, the substitute at right tackle, was caught off side, and his team was penalized for five yards. A pass to Fortescue fell short, and Brighton's quarter back next made a yard through tackle. Then Walthall's right

end lost five yards for his team by being off side, so that off-side honors were about even.

The Blue and White was putting up a wonderful defense; and as the play shifted back and forth in slight gains and losses, the fighting instinct got the upper hand, and Brighton was penalized fifteen yards for holding. Brighton's right half faked a kick, but failed to gain around the end. On the following play, the right half ran back and, crowded hard by Walthall men, tossed the pigskin prettily for thirty-five yards to Fortescue—just as the whistle announced the end of the half.

It had been a tense quarter, and as the players left the field with the score so far a blank on each side, the enthusiasm of the stands broke loose in unprecedented volume.

"Walthall came near a spill and no mistake," commented the judge.

"Did you notice how Patterson came back?" croaked the colonel, husky from cheering. "He's playing the game of his life, judge!"

"Well, he did seem to pull himself together in good shape," admitted the judge, "but his conscience will get after him again; never knew it to fail; that fumble was a straw in the wind."

Folsom caught the judge by the arm. "Look across the field, judge," he requested. "See that man with the dark face, the black mustache and the light-colored cap—the one beside that girl who is standing up and waving a Red and White pennant?"

It was difficult to take note of individuals in the opposite tier of seats, because of the excited moving about of the spectators. Presently, however, the man indicated by Folsom arose and made his way out of the stand. Then the judge got a good look at him.

"Never saw him before," said the judge. "He's a new one on me."

"New to me, too," spoke up the colonel. "He's a Brighton man, I guess. Why do you single him out, professor?"

Before Folsom could answer, Harrington, the real-estate man from Walthall, leaned forward. He had overheard Folsom's question.

"That man, judge," said he, "is 'Crick'

Wilders, one of the tough birds of this college town. He's a card shark and has a bad name. Pardon me for butting in, but your friend wanted to know. I'm not acquainted with the fellow, but he's been pointed out to me as the kind of a man to let alone."

"Thanks, Harrington," said the judge. Then he turned to the professor. "Why your sudden interest in Crick Wilders, Folsom?"

"His face," the professor answered, "proclaims a criminal bent of mind—so I was interested professionally."

Folsom, however, was dissembling. As the Brighton eleven left the field for their training quarters, he had seen Crick Wilders lean forward, capture the attention of Fortescue, and make an indefinite gesture with his right hand. Fortescue had whirled about, ignoring the gesture, and trooped away with his teammates.

Harrington's explanation must have been enlightening to Folsom, since it caused him to hold back information regarding what he had seen. The professor's wits were working at the particular business that had brought him to the game—a comparison of the mental make-up of the two cousins in the light of what he would have called their "motor expressions." The professor went for a stroll during the rest period, returning shortly.

In the quarters, the Brighton players were receiving the attentions of the trainers. Fortescue was being looked after, and the coach was giving some instructions, when one of the training crew brought a message to the half back.

"Crick Wilders is at the door, Fortescue, and wants to see you for a minute."

"This is no place for outsiders now," put in the coach, "least of all for outsiders like Wilders."

"He says he can put Fortescue wise to something," said the messenger.

"We don't want anything from him, so send him about his business."

Fortescue sat up on his bench. "It won't do any harm to hear what he has to say, coach," he remarked.

"Nothing doing," was the sharp response. "Tell Wilders so from me," he added, to the messenger.

In the other quarters under the stands Wharton was milling around, watching his men carefully, and inspiring them with his own confidence. "Nothing to nothing is the score," he was saying, "and the way you lads braced and held during that second quarter was beautiful to see. You realize by now that never was this team up against a tougher proposition. You had an off spell when the quarter started, Patterson," he added, "but you more than made up for it." He studied the half back for a moment. "Feeling all right, Chug?"

"Top-hole, coach."

Patterson knew that Wharton was thinking of that nocturnal ramble the night before and of the unpleasantness in the hotel lobby in the forenoon; but he met the probing eyes of the coach squarely and evidently satisfied him.

The thing known as "the personal equation" had been wiped out of Patterson's mind, not to reappear during the remainder of the game. Fortescue's troubles, the judge's grouch, the sinister face in the stand—all these were powerless against Patterson's will to carry on for the varsity.

When the game was over—well, that was something else again and concerned a situation to be met in its proper order.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE LAST MINUTE.

AS the second half progressed, the inability of either side to score seemed more pronounced than ever. Dogged determination was displayed by both teams, aerial attacks were numerous, and the hammering back and forth was as savage as it was persistent.

The half began with Fortescue kicking off to Patterson, who ran the ball back to the thirty-five-yard line; and from then on for the rest of the third quarter the battle raged up and down the field, the rival elevens locking horns and pushing a little, yielding a little, but never making a serious threat at the enemy goal—except once. That was when Fortescue, taking a forlorn chance, sprinted prettily for eleven yards around the Walthall end only to encounter Patterson, who dropped him in a masterful tackle.

"That's your blasted luck," panted Fortescue, his voice trembling with hate and his fists doubling, "but you can't always hold out on me—and I'll get you yet, you sneaking pussyfooter!"

No one else heard that snarling, bitter jibe, and Patterson let it pass without comment. He had closed the door for good on his personal differences with his cousin and would not allow it to be opened until the game was finished. He wondered how Fortescue, cherishing his hot grudges, could play so brilliantly with such a handicap.

A little later the quarter ended, just as Patterson kicked outside on the fifty-two-yard line.

The last session began with Patterson intercepting a pass on the forty-two-yard line and then being held in a run around the end. Another pass was incomplete; and another, Walthall's left half to left end, gained five yards. Brighton got the ball on their thirty-two-yard line when Carter kicked.

The playing became fast and furious, with the empty score board mocking the rival teams and spurring them to desperation. There was some penalizing for off side, but more for roughing. The captains fought the rising tide of temper as best they could and strove to keep their men in check.

As the hot contest continued, with the ball in Walthall's possession, Ames, the Blue and White full back, made three through center. Time was called while Spicer, Walthall's left end, was replaced by a man from the benches.

Up in the stand, the judge was looking at his watch. His hand shook a little as he held the timepiece. "Less than five minutes left," he announced in a husky voice; "I don't believe there'll be any scoring."

"Even money Walthall scores!" barked the colonel.

"That's too good to miss," said the judge, finding the bet a relief for his surcharged feelings. "You're on, Wade, for twenty-five bones."

Presently a pass, Walthall's left half to left end, gained six yards; then the left half plowed through the opposition for a yard. Next, Patterson found a hole for a ten-yard gain, and, with the ball

nearing the center of the field, the fans went wild.

"Chug, chug, chug-chug-chug!" roared the Blue and White rooters. "Give us a touchdown, Chug!"

Derisive yells from across the stadium answered the wild call. Signals shot out like the cracks of a whip. The minutes were slipping away, and both quarter backs were hurling their best men at the opposing line. Patterson slammed through tackle for five yards more. Carter tossed a pass to left end for a twenty-yard gain; and on the next play, the man who had taken Spicer's place was thrown for the loss of a yard.

There fell a sudden silence. The ball was near the middle of the field; and then Patterson, dropping back with it to the forty-yard line, kicked a perfect field goal.

Colonel Wade jumped up on his seat, knocking off the judge's hat as he did so. He waved his arms and yelled at the top of his lungs, and the judge had to grab him by the coat tails and pull him down.

"Don't be premature, Wade," said the judge gruffly. "There are three minutes left—and a lot can happen in three minutes in a football game."

"Gi'me the money, you old sardine!" taunted the colonel. "I'm not looking for anything more to happen, and that wasn't in the bet, anyway. Look at that Walthall three on the score board!"

"You win," returned the judge; "but wait—and keep your eye on Fortescue."

Patterson kicked off to Collins, right end for Brighton. The Brighton pass that followed was incomplete; and then Brighton uncovered something, seeking to wrest victory from defeat by a sensational play.

The Brighton line was rushed by the enemy, and there came a dashing maneuver by Brighton to block the Walthall back field. Fortescue, temporarily, was lost sight of—by all of the opposition except Patterson. Sneaking across the field, Fortescue took the ball on a pass over the heads of the tangled players. It was a perfect pass, and Fortescue, with less than a minute to go, flashed toward the Walthall goal with a clear field ahead of him—almost.

There followed a wild scramble by the

Blue and White to intercept the runner. For ten of the players it was hopeless to try, and in their chagrin and dismay they knew it. For the eleventh Walthall man, however, Patterson, the old reliable, there was a chance; and he was ready for it.

With the seconds ticking off swiftly the closing minutes of the game, and with the game lost if the runner reached the goal posts, Patterson, who had been playing well back to bar the way to the goal, realized that on himself alone the issue of the hard-fought battle depended.

He braced himself, waited and watched, knowing well that he had to contend with the nimblest dodger and the fleetest runner of the opposing team. It was a breathless moment, and no voice from the onlookers broke the dramatic silence. Fortescue, with the ball tucked under his arm, had left every one behind him—every one except the coolly calculating Patterson.

"Go, Chug!" begged the husky voice of Colonel Wade, breaking the stillness. "Why don't you go?"

Chug went, but not until the psychological moment. Like an able sprinter, he was in his stride the instant he left his mark. His course was cleverly conned toward a point where, speed of both runners considered, the meeting must take place.

Fortescue realized his danger; but if his eyes revealed his fears, they also expressed his determination and his confidence. Without diminishing speed, he flung a little to one side. Then his eyes flamed with sudden anger.

He struck out with his fist. It was a short-arm jab, curtailed by his body and screened on the other side by the body of Patterson. The proximity of the two men would have made any hint of roughing an exceedingly debatable point—from the side lines.

Patterson felt the fist as it landed on his chest. At the same moment, no doubt because he was thrown off his balance by the blow, Fortescue fell as Patterson's arms went round him. They dropped, with Patterson on top, just as the whistle announced the conclusion of the game.

The Walthall half back lifted himself unsteadily. His face was white, and he gasped for breath.

"What's the matter, Chug?" asked Corey, as the players began gathering around.

"N-nothing," Patterson answered, standing unsteadily and wiping the perspiration out of his eyes. Dazedly he looked down at his cousin. "What's wrong with Jerry?"

Fortescue's face was as white as Patterson's, and it was dull and expressionless. His body was limp and inert.

"The breath has been knocked out of him; that's all," said Corey.

Patterson dropped to his knees and was lifting his cousin's head when the Brighton trainer and a doctor pushed through the crowd. Corey ran an arm through Patterson's and led him away in the direction of the Blue and White quarters under the stands.

Judge Briscoe passed the two, hurrying in the direction of the place where Fortescue lay sprawled. He hardly looked at Patterson as he ran on. Colonel Wade, who was close behind the judge, halted, shook Patterson's nerveless hand, and said some kindly and encouraging things which were only faintly grasped by the half back.

"Three to nothing in favor of Walthall," Corey said with a chuckle, as he and Patterson went on. "You saved the day for the old Blue and White, my son," he added. "Wasn't there some funny work, there by our goal posts? What did Fortescue try to do?"

"We just crashed together," replied Patterson evasively.

"Looked kind of queer, the way Fortescue plowed into the ground with his head. That tumble wasn't like him, at all."

"I'm sorry it ended like this," muttered Patterson, "and I hope he's all right."

"Stop your fussing, Chug! Of course he's all right."

CHAPTER XI.

SEVERAL QUESTIONS.

IT had been a big victory for Walthall, and the visiting rooters staged their snake dance on the playing field and writhed up and down with their band in the lead. The accident to Fortescue, it was reported from the dressing rooms,

was nothing more serious than an ordinary football casualty.

A broken collar bone would have been nothing unusual, but the doctor had not been able to discover a fracture of any sort. This was good news to Walthall and Brighton alike, and the Red and White were good sportsmen and tendered their congratulations to the winning team.

A supper and a dance were always on the program when the two varsity teams clashed on the gridiron, and the custom was not to be neglected on this the day of this game. Red and White were the hosts, and the scene was to be the banquet room at the Balmoral. As rapidly as they could, the Walthall men were slipping away to the hotel to get ready for the festivities.

The fans crowded to the dressing rooms under the stands and bawled loudly for Patterson. They wanted to ride their star half back around on their shoulders. This had been their fond intention all the time, but Patterson had left the field before they could carry it out.

They were doomed to disappointment, for Corey appeared and informed the enthusiastic crowd that Patterson had already left for the hotel—in a car with Colonel Wade.

"We'll get him at his room," yelled one of the undergrads, "and carry him up and down the main street! Don't let that band get away!"

Patterson had, indeed, been carried off by Colonel Wade. The colonel came alone, and he wore a troubled look and had a nervous way with him that was rather disturbing to Patterson.

"Where's the judge, colonel?" Patterson inquired.

"He's over in the other camp, looking after Fortescue," was the answer. "He knows I'm going to the hotel with you, though, and he'll be along before many minutes."

"I believe I'll go over to the dressing rooms myself. I'd like to know——"

The colonel shut down on that. "The judge expects us to go to the hotel and wait for him there, Patterson, so I don't think you'd better stop. Here's the car."

Wade hustled Patterson into the machine and gave hurried orders to the

chauffeur, as though to cut short further argument.

"Fortescue is all right, is he?" Patterson asked, peering in the direction of the Brighton dressing rooms as the car rolled away.

"The doctor says he is. It was a queer tumble he got—for one who is usually so sure on his feet. Have you any idea what caused him to pitch forward and stand on his head, Chug?"

Patterson looked into the shrewd eyes of his friend, then turned to look out of the window again. "It was something like one of those happen-chances that are always liable to crop up in a football game," he answered. "He fell just as I tackled, and I came down on him harder than I intended. I hope," he went on, turning back to the colonel, "that nobody blames me?"

"Nobody does," the colonel replied; "but it was a queer tumble, and everybody is more or less up in the air as to how it happened."

"What does Fortescue say about it?"

"Not a word, yet; you see, he hadn't corralled his wits when I left. The doctor thought it would be only a few minutes, though, before he came around."

When they left the machine at the hotel, Patterson had it in mind to wait for the judge in the lobby; the colonel, however, suggested that they go up to Patterson's room and do their waiting there.

A number of little things were happening to cause Patterson considerable uneasiness; and this last idea of the colonel's to wait for the judge in Patterson's room was one of them.

Now that the game was out of the way, Patterson was face to face with the big problem involving Fortescue. That was the next thing to be attended to—a duty not to be set aside or shirked. What Patterson was determined to do was to have a talk with his cousin and leave to him the explanation due the judge in the matter of the bonds. Patterson had certain fixed principles in the matter of Fortescue, and he was firmly resolved to uphold them at any cost to himself.

While awaiting the coming of the judge, Patterson excused himself to Wade and got into the clothes he was to wear that

evening. He finished just as the judge and the professor arrived. Why, Patterson asked himself, was the judge bringing this stranger with him?

Folsom was introduced. The judge's manner was brusque and not at all friendly. Here was another cause for mental disturbance on Patterson's part.

"I brought Professor Folsom to the game and here to your room, for a purpose, Hale," the judge explained. "He's anxious to meet you."

The professor's long face wore an amiable smile. "Would you mind telling us, Mr. Patterson," he asked, "what happened during the last few seconds of the final minute of the game?"

Patterson stared at Folsom. "Those in the stands are probably better able to tell what happened than I am, professor," he said. "Things like that occur right along on the football field. Just a case of a hard fall."

"That's all you have to say, is it, Hale?" put in the judge.

"That's about all, Uncle Amos."

"Have you ever seen this before?" the judge inquired.

Patterson started. Under his eyes, in the judge's hand, was the Perrigord bond. Slowly a light was beginning to dawn in the half back's mind, but as yet it was very dim and uncertain.

"What's the number?" queried Patterson, bending closer to read the red figures and make sure. "Ah, I see! Yes, sir; I have seen that bond before. It's one of the five bonds taken from the safe in your study."

"You had it in your satchel; that's where it was found by the man who delivered it to me."

"What man found it?"

"Bogart, a private detective I hired to run down that little matter connected with the missing bonds. I want you to be frank with me, Hale!"

In the judge's last words there was an accusation that caused the room to begin spinning around. Patterson collapsed into a chair. He looked from the stern face of his uncle to the kindly, encouraging face of the colonel; and from the colonel, his eyes wandered to the long face and keenly probing gaze of the professor.

"You don't think, Uncle Amos—you

can't possibly think—that I took those bonds?"

"Of course not, Chug," struck in Wade. "All he wants to know is just how that bond got into your grip, where his detective found it."

Patterson braced himself and tried to do some clear thinking. "When did your detective put that bond in your hands, Uncle Amos?" he inquired.

"Over in Walthall, before we left there for Brighton," the judge answered.

The dawning light grew a little brighter, a little less confusing in Patterson's mind. He understood, now, why his uncle had kept away from him before the game. "I see," he remarked. "You haven't said a word to me about the bond, Uncle Amos, until this minute; you were afraid that if I learned what you knew, I'd do some poor work in the back field. You don't really know me, after all."

"I'm trying hard to understand you, Hale," said the judge, not unkindly. "It was a hard blow, when the detective put the bond in my hands and told me where he had found it. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing, Uncle Amos," returned Patterson steadily, "except this: I found the bond last night, and it disappeared this forenoon—and that's all I have to tell you."

"Where are the other four bonds?"

"I wish I knew, but I don't."

"You say you found this one. Where?"

"I can't tell you—now."

"Then I'm to think——"

There came a burst of loud voices in the corridor; running feet were heard, and the door was flung open.

"Say, Chug," came a yell, "we want you! Come on, now! You gave us the slip at the stadium, but——"

The speaker, one of Patterson's classmates, was framed in the doorway; back of him, peering over his shoulders, was a small-sized mob of undergraduates. The sight of Patterson, evidently in conference with three older men, took the newcomers aback.

"I'm busy now, fellows," said Patterson. "You'll have to excuse me."

"All right," was the disappointed answer, "but when you're through, come down. Give him a yell, men!"

CHAPTER XII.

MORE SENSATIONS.

THE third floor of the hotel echoed and reëchoed with a yell that had three Pattersons at the end of it; and then, baffled, the would-be lionizers trooped away. Those young fellows had come to get their football hero and, in their own way, to do him honor. The hero was fighting with his back to the wall, inspired by the same high principles that had led him to decline the captaincy of the Blue and White football team—a quixotic consideration for one who had been a close friend and was now an avowed enemy.

The uproar in the corridor died away. Out in front of the hotel the Walthall Silver Cornet Band struck up "Hail to the Chief," by way of conveying the sentiments of Walthall U to the distinguished gridiron warrior in the third-floor room.

"Hang it, judge," growled Co'onel Wade, getting off the edge of the bed and moving to a window, "this is too much!"

The judge tightened his jaws. It wasn't easy for him, either. There was never a time on the bench when his stern duty called for a greater sacrifice of personal feeling; but he was as determined to follow his duty as Patterson was to uphold his principles.

Professor Folsom was the only one in the room who smiled. He sat there like a benignant old owl, blinking amiably at Patterson through his glasses.

"Where are the other four bonds, Hale?" demanded the judge.

"I wish I knew," answered Patterson, "but I don't—I haven't the least idea."

"Why won't you explain where you got this one?"

"Because—I beg your pardon—I don't think it proper."

"Do you think it proper for me to draw ugly inferences from the evidence?"

Patterson made a helpless gesture. "I can't help that, sir," he said, "but I should think you know me well enough to give me the benefit of the doubt."

There came more steps in the hall. They approached the door of Patterson's room, halted, and a rap fell on the door.

"Go away!" called the judge irritably, thinking the football fans were back again. "Patterson's busy."

"It's me, judge—Bogart, the Ferret. I got something important."

"Come in, then."

The door opened and the ratlike man with the hatchet face and the gumshoe tread pushed Crick Wilders across the threshold and followed him into the room. Wilders looked bored, but otherwise jauntily defiant.

"What the deuce are you bringing that man here for, Bogart?" queried the judge fretfully.

"Sort of a sensation, huh?" The Ferret closed the door and faced the judge with a flourish. "Well, whenever I'm hooked up with a case sensations are pretty apt to happen. Kind of a jigger I am—way I work." He turned to Folsom. "Perfesser," he went on, "your tip was a peach! I landed on Mr. Wilders here with ground to spare. Now we've got this bond case sewed up at both ends. There's the other four Ferrigord documents, judge."

He put the four missing bonds in the limp hand of Judge Briscoe. The judge was confused and astonished. He stared at the bonds, at Wilders, at Folsom, and at last at the detective.

"Wilders had them?" Briscoe asked.

"I'll say he had," chirped Bogart genially, "and I forced him to shell 'em out! Tact, that's my long suit—that, and knowin' how to handle 'em. Oh, yes; Wilders gave up. There's more up his sleeve than them bonds, though. Him and your nephew seems to have been workin' together. Patterson," he added, "your old friend, Mr. Crick Wilders. Ain't you got a pleasant greeting for your side kick?"

"Wilders?" echoed Patterson. "Why, I don't know him from Adam. I saw him in the crowd at the game, but that was the first time."

"Steady now, steady," cautioned the Ferret; "you can't string anybody, you know. You recognize the nephew, don't you, Wilders?"

The gambler studied Patterson dispassionately. "This bird?" he asked. "Well, hardly. He ain't the nephew I was talkin' about. Fortescue is the one I meant. First time I ever saw Patterson was this afternoon, on the football field."

Bogart the Ferret staggered back; the

judge gasped; the colonel looked really happy and began to take fresh interest in the proceedings; the professor chuckled; and the dismayed Patterson rallied in support of his principles.

"Don't take this man's word for anything, judge!" said Patterson earnestly. "Can't you tell, just by the look of him, that he's not reliable?"

CHAPTER XIII.

GETTING AT THE TRUTH.

ORDINARILY," remarked the judge, bracing himself, "Wilders may not be reliable, but he ought to know that he's facing serious consequences, right now, and only an honest statement of fact will help him."

Wilders leered. "Serious consequences!" he echoed. "Where do you get that stuff? Think I'd be trailin' along with Bogart if I saw any trouble on the sky line? Nary; I'd have hopped a rattler first and be on my way to wherever I was goin'. Say, I've got a swell way out of this; and, knowin' that, I'll talk straight. 'Little Forty,' the campus darling, can't pull a raw deal on me and get away with it—not at all, not so you can notice."

"He's a shifty bird," remarked Bogart, recovering somewhat from his recent jolt, "but I make a guess, based on long experience with his kind, that Wilders knows what he knows."

"What do you know about Wilders, professor?" the judge went on, showing by his manner a heightened respect for the psychology expert. "How were you able to set Bogart on his trail?"

"Ratiocination," explained the professor; then he went on in words of fewer syllables; "in other words, deductive reasoning. At the football game I discovered that Fortescue and Wilders knew each other; and Mr. Harrington's explanation of Wilders' character, coupled with my own study of Wilders' physiognomy, impelled me to leave my seat and look for Mr. Bogart. I gave Mr. Bogart what is called a 'tip,' and Mr. Bogart, by his well-known enterprise, has used the tip in bringing about remarkable developments."

"The prof," expanded Bogart, "sure

pinned his rose on the right party. I ran down this gent, and it only took a couple o' dozen words to get him to spill everything. Only," and the detective looked worried, "we went wrong on the nephew part. I took it he meant Patterson, when he was referrin' to Fortescue."

"Where did you get the four stolen bonds, Wilders?" demanded the judge.

"My hands are clean," said Wilders suavely; "Fortescue turned them over to me, in satisfaction of a debt of honor."

"You mean a gambling debt?"

"Well, you might call it that. A lot of the Brighton students like a little game on the side, and I'm always in a receptive mood." Wilders smirked. "Poker helps a lot in teachin' the young idee how to shoot, as the sayin' is. For several months I been helpin' Fortescue, on the q. t., learn nerve control with a deck of cards.

"He got to owe me a considerable—five hundred dollars it amounted to when I reckoned he'd better take up his I O Us and settle. He settled—with a forged check, drawn in his favor and signed 'Amos Briscoe.' He——" Wilders broke off. "Sorry, judge, if it comes hard, but you wanted the facts."

The judge's face reflected his horror; nevertheless, he straightened up and pushed on relentlessly. "Why did you never try to cash that check, Wilders?"

"Mainly because Fortescue lost his nerve and asked me not to," was the answer. "Later on, he brought me the four bonds and asked me to hold them and the check until he could raise five hundred in cash. He was so long coming across with the mazuma that I got sort of impatient. And I knew there was another bond he was holding out on me. I wanted that bond, but he wouldn't give up. There was a coldness between us, but you can guess I didn't worry a whole lot. I had Forty, the campus darling, all right."

"Where's that forged check?" went on the judge, restraining his temper with difficulty.

"You want it, eh? Well, nix on that, judge. I'll pass it over when I get a good check for five hundred, signed by your own hand; and along with the check I've got to have a promise that I'm

let out of the whole mess, clean and fair."

The judge was not above reversing some of his ideas. Brought to the pinch, with a forgery charge against one of his nephews, he could do something in memory of a loved sister who had long before passed to her reward. Never, in all his experience, had that old copy-book line about "Evil communications corrupt good manners" been more clearly exemplified than in the case of poor Jerry Fortescue and this scheming blackleg, Crick Wilders.

The judge uncapped a fountain pen, pulled his check book from his pocket, did a little writing, and tore out a check. "Let me see that forged paper," he said angrily.

Wilders cheerfully produced the evidence and handed it over. The judge examined it, then tore it into scraps, and flung the scraps into a wastebasket.

"There's your money," he said, giving Wilders the check he had just written. "Now you are going to leave Brighton for good," he snapped, "and if I ever hear of you in this town or in Walthall making victims of the college students, I'll camp on your trail till I get you and get you right. Take him away, Bogart!" he finished.

A few seconds of silence ensued after the detective and the gambler had left the room. The judge sat in a chair, his chin bowed forward on his breast, his hands clutching the chair arms. Every one in the room, Patterson most of all, was sorry for him.

"Maybe it isn't so bad, Uncle Amos, as Wilders tries to make out," said Patterson, moving over to his uncle's side. "I know you always thought a lot of Jerry, and you'd better get his side of this before you come down too hard on him. Up to two years ago, nothing like this could ever have happened; Jerry has been different, somehow, since his sophomore year at Brighton, and nearly everything he's been doing is more or less of a mystery."

"I'm asking you again, Hale," said the judge, looking up, "where you got that bond Bogart found in your grip?"

"I can't tell you about that."

"If Wilders told the truth, and I'm

sure he did, Jerry had that bond. You say it came into your hands last night. Did you take it away from your cousin?"

"I can't say a word about that, Uncle Amos," Patterson persisted.

Here the hall door, left partly ajar by Bogart and Wilders when they went out, was pushed open.

"Chug won't tell you, but I will!" said a voice. "He's trying to make things easy for me; that's all."

Every one in the room jerked around to face the open door. Fortescue stood there, his curling yellow hair framing a bandage that bound his brows. His face was white, but resolute. Gone now was the mocking, dare-devil expression which it had worn for so long. In its place was the earnest look of the old days when Patterson was David, and when Fortescue was Jonathan.

"Had—had you ought to be here, Jerry?" faltered the judge. "You don't look well—"

"I'm well enough, Uncle Amos," said Fortescue, "and this is exactly where I ought to be. I've got something to tell you, and I'm going to tell it."

There was moral courage evident in the words and the bearing of Jerry Fortescue. Folsom, of course, was quick to see it, but it was so plain as not to be missed by any of the others.

"We'll go, judge," spoke up the colonel, making a move toward the door.

"No, please," begged Fortescue; "Chug didn't demand an executive session, and neither shall I. You have all of you heard the worst about him, and now you've all got to stay and hear the worst about me. That's only fair, eh, Chug?"

CHAPTER XIV.

SQUARING THE COMPLEXES.

DUE to his hurt, Fortescue was not very steady on his feet, and Patterson jumped to put an arm about him and support him to the bed. Sitting there, Fortescue leaned back against the pillows Patterson arranged for his comfort. Fortescue, at these attentions, smiled at his cousin and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Good old Chug!" he murmured. "I've certainly missed you, these two years past. You were always a sort of balance

wheel, when we were in high school together, to keep me running steady and straight; and later on at different prep schools and during my first year at Brighton, when we got together and you tried to teach me football, I certainly owed a lot to you."

"That's all right, Jerry," said Patterson huskily as he turned away. "You never got from me the half that I got from you, old chap."

"Did you tell them I gave you a thump in the solar plexus when we came together during the last minute of play?" Fortescue went on. "No; you didn't! Did you tell them I got you away from the hotel at midnight last night and tried to pick a fight? Not you!

"Did you tell them we exchanged overcoats in the old barn and that the bond you found was in the pocket of my coat? No, sir! I met Bogart and Wilders outside the hotel as I was coming in, and both of them told me something! But they couldn't either of them tell me much about you that I didn't already know."

Colonel Wade moved over to the window and looked out. Something was pulling at his heartstrings, and he tried to ease the strain by whistling softly. The judge, stern champion of the law and the evidence, lowered his eyes and blinked. Only the professor preserved his poise; for, deep reader of human motives and their causes, physical and otherwise, he saw in this reconciliation a deeper and happier meaning than was apparent to either the colonel or the judge.

"I haven't been the same, Uncle Amos," Fortescue went on, facing the judge, "since that day, more than two years ago, when I got that bad jolt trying to make good at football. Honest, I was a mystery to myself. After the jolt, everything seemed to come easy for me. My class standing took the biggest kind of a jump and without any hard plugging at my books. As for football—well, I won a trial on the varsity, as everybody knows, and made good.

"I tried to figure out how it all happened, and what caused the change in me, but gave it up long ago," he continued. "I just took the matter as I found it and went ahead regardless. I was puzzled most, I think, by my atti-

tude toward Chug. He had always been my best friend, but I fairly hated him. It struck me that he was trying to cut me out of your favor, and I got the notion that he was constantly carrying tales. You see," and Fortescue smiled grimly, "there were a lot of tales he could carry, and that aroused the suspicion.

"I got in with a tough set; two or three of them got expelled, but I was clever enough to fool the faculty. They never got the goods on me. Skylarking around never seemed to make any difference with my class standing or with my football work. I kept at the top. What I wanted to do was to make a better showing than Chug did. I thought him a mucker, and my one idea was to show him up.

"You have probably been told of my dealings with Crick Wilders," Fortescue went on. "I wanted money, and my allowance wasn't enough. Wilders persuaded me to piece out the allowance by a little easy winning at poker. I fell for it. For a while I did turn up some easy money, but during the last year my luck wasn't so good, for I lost more than I won. Wilders kept taking my I O Us until he had five hundred dollars' worth of them; then he pressed me to settle.

"He swore that if I didn't settle, he'd take the I O Us to you, Uncle Amos. That scared me stiff; and, in order to keep him from making such a move, I did a fool thing. I wrote a check in my favor and signed your name to it; but I hadn't much more than turned the check over to Wilders than I got cold feet.

"I tried to get the check back by telling Wilders that it wasn't any good. That only made the thing worse. Gardner, the secretary you discharged, was a friend of Wilders', and I guess the next move Wilders suggested to me he got from Gardner. Anyhow, Wilders told me you had bonds in your safe; and that if I could get some of the bonds and turn them over to him as security, he'd hold the forged check until I could take it up with cash. Otherwise, he'd take my poker I O Us straight to you. I was desperate; but I never intended to rob you, Uncle Amos. That was farthest from my mind, last week Saturday, when I

went to Walthall and asked you for a raise in my allowance.

"As I sat by the table in your study," he continued, "I saw a slip with the combination numbers of the safe. It was right under my eyes all the while you were lecturing me and cutting my allowance in two instead of raising it. Well, I needn't go into what happened that night. I was desperate.

"I let Wilders have four of the bonds as security for the five-hundred-dollar debt. When I gave him the five hundred in cash, he was to return the bonds and the forged check. I kept out the one bond and was planning to return it to you by mail, in such a way that you wouldn't know who sent it.

"Next year, when I'm done with school, I have planned to sell aluminum ware. It was my idea that I could make enough at that to settle with Wilders and square everything. It looked easy. Wilders was satisfied, and I thought I was going to win out. Then, suddenly, Wilders began prodding me about the other bond. He had seen by the papers that five had been stolen, and he wanted all five. That's where I rebelled.

"Then, last night, Chug got my overcoat by mistake," Fortescue continued. "I was carrying the bond around with me, fearing to leave it in my rooms. At first, I thought the bond and the overcoat had been burned in the old barn across from the athletic field; then I happened to see Chug and learned that he had taken my coat by mistake.

"That made me wild; and I was wilder still when Chug returned my overcoat in the lobby of this hotel, and I found the bond wasn't in the overcoat pocket. I reasoned, of course, that Chug had taken it and that he was going to spill the whole thing to you. I tried to jump him in the lobby, but as usual he was too clever for me.

"I had that load on me during my playing this afternoon. It didn't bother me much—even when I saw Wilders in the crowd and knew by the look of him that he was getting ready to do something that might be called drastic. He tried to see me at the training quarters between halves, but the coach wouldn't allow it.

"I had my chance to beat Walthall during the last minute of the game; but Chug bobbed up, the only man of his whole eleven to get in my way. I handed him a good one with my fist, and no one but Chug and I were wise to it; but that jab played the deuce with me, and I stumbled and pitched forward on my head, with Chug on top of me like a thousand of brick.

"After that I drew a long blank, very much as I did in my sophomore year—only this one wasn't so long. When I came around, I seemed to see things differently. I realized what a fool I had been to have anything to do with Crick Wilders, in the first place, and to rough it with good old Chug, and to do a hundred and one of the crazy things I had been doing. I made up my mind, there in the training quarters, that I'd find you and make a clean breast of everything. They told me you had come over to Chug's room at the Balmoral, and one of the fellows gave me a lift in his roadster.

"Down below, as I said, I met Bogart and Wilders," Fortescue went on. "They told me a good deal, and out there in the hall, through the partly opened door, I heard Chug begging off when you quizzed him about the bond. I was glad then that I'd come; and I'm more than glad that I've told you the whole business, Uncle Amos. I'm ready to take my medicine."

The judge twisted uncomfortably in his chair.

"Uncle Amos," spoke up Patterson eagerly, "you can see, everybody can see, that Jerry was framed by Crick Wilders. Wilders had him under his thumb. In Jerry's place, I'd have done the same thing——"

"No; you wouldn't, Patterson," put in the professor. "You didn't get a jolt during your sophomore year, and your complexes were not mixed. You couldn't have done the same thing, for your psychic energy would have sublimated itself along a different conation.

"Judge," continued Folsom, turning to Briscoe, "you brought me to this football game for a purpose, and I'm going to make good. Your nephew, Fortescue, has had two years of mental disturbance dur-

ing which, while legally responsible, he was not morally so. But the complexes have been squared, and Fortescue has returned to normal—that happy solution was accomplished during the last minute of play this afternoon.

"A remarkable case, sir, a very remarkable case; but as plain as print in all its details. I should like to write this up for one of the journals to which I occasionally contribute—properly masking the identity of all participants, of course."

"No, sir," said the judge with finality; "this is a family affair, and it goes no further, masked or unmasked. Next year, when he quits college, Fortescue is going to sell aluminum ware until he makes enough to pay me back five hundred dollars in cold cash. After that, if he proves he's normal and doesn't relapse through another crack on the dome that conceals his thoughts, I'll consider his case further.

"As for Patterson— Hale," he said, getting up and going over to the Walthall half back, "I've done you an injustice. When you're through with Walthall, I'll take care of you."

"Uncle Amos," returned Patterson, rising and meeting the judge face to face, "when you take care of Jerry, I shall be glad to have you give me a chance to work and make good. Meanwhile, when

I quit Walthall, I'm asking Jerry to let me go into partnership with him selling aluminum ware."

"I was sort of expecting some such foolishness as that from you," remarked the judge, dropping a hand on Patterson's shoulder and reaching out the other hand to Fortescue. "In the face of your loyalty to Jerry," he continued, "I don't know how I could possibly prove myself an old tyrant. You set me a good example, Hale." He put his arm around Fortescue's shoulders. "You lads are like you used to be again, aren't you?" he asked. "Not seniors any more with a kindergarten turn of mind?"

"I'm for Chug," breathed Fortescue, in a choking voice, "until my last breath."

They clasped hands, and the colonel and the professor sidled toward the door.

"No place for us, now," said the colonel happily, when they were out in the hall. "Professor, you've done a big day's work."

"Not I, colonel," protested the professor; "it was Patterson who did the work."

Did you like this story, or did you not? If you liked it, please let us know why in a letter, briefly worded. If you did not like it, let us know that and why. And while you are about it, comment on any other story in this number, or give us your opinion of the number as a whole.



NOVEMBER RECOMPENSE

By Freeman Harrison

NOVEMBER, it is true that thou art drear,
 Prophetic of the frigid days to come
 When dull, dun fields lie cold and sadly sere,
 And gods of wind hold icy masterdom.

And yet, keen month, much beauty hast thou, too—
 Thy rustling forests songs of gladness sing,
 With partridge at some leaf-veiled rendezvous,
 The golden pheasant mounting on the wing;

A red, red sun that sinks in magic flare
 Behind old, brownish oaks which age defy;
 A star that gleams bright through the crystal air,
 A frail moon lucent in the evening sky.

Desert

Water Witch-

By
Harrison Conrad—



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

AN INCONGRUOUS PAIR.

THOUGH he worked like one possessed, Jim Cullom had been acting strangely ever since he and "Dad" Maguire had made the strike. It was a glory hole, snug in a remote nook away back in the secret folds of the Granite Wash Mountains. Nature had simply neglected to spill her ladle after she had assembled and melted that rich fraction of her yellow store. She had cached it there, just where granite meets porphyry, confident in the belief, no doubt, that it was safe forever.

She had not counted, however, on wizened, little old Dad Maguire, grown shrewd in the sly subtleties of her trickery in the sixty-odd years that she had jostled him about, none too gently, and Dad's partner, Jim Cullom, thirty, upon whom she had lavished an excess of bigness of bone and body, as well as good looks, as a sort of compensation for her niggardly skimping of these desirable qualities when she had equipped the elder man.

It may be that she had hidden the precious hoard away and had left it in trust, there in that secret vault in the gaunt desert mountains, through all the changing ages expressly for Dad Maguire

and Jim Cullom. Anyhow, they found it—at least, Dad did—and Jim's strong arm did mighty near all the rest. Call it luck or destiny, the result is the same.

Dad and Jim were an incongruous pair. Sixty and thirty do not often make congenial pals; but in this case the association was logical enough. Jim's father, Sam Cullom, had been Dad's prospecting partner in days gone by. He had crossed the Great Divide, leaving no heritage to his son except a half interest in a few burros, some prospecting tools and camp equipment, and, of more importance, an irresistible inborn call of the open spaces.

In his self-drawn will, which was never probated, for it was made in a spirit of ironic levity, Dad Maguire was humorously named the executor, with the added request that he appoint himself guardian over Jim, who was already a six-foot-two mass of hard muscle and was well beyond his majority.

Jim regarded these covenants more or less seriously, and in good time Dad yielded to his insistence and accepted him to fill the place left vacant by the passing of the elder Cullom. Jim was twenty-five then. From the very beginning, the bond between them was like the immutable tie of father and son rather than merely an arbitrary copartnership, created by affixing their signatures to a typewritten instrument.

Stray prospectors stopped at their camp in the Granite Wash Mountains from time to time; but Dad and Jim wisely dropped no hint of their discovery. So the restless desert Argonauts whacked their burros on over the hills, ignorant of the rich strike.

Then, only a few days before the deposit petered out, came the young tenderfoot with the single overburdened burro. Dave Garretson, he said his name was. Three water kegs and a camp outfit, scant as it was, made a cumbersome load for the lone animal. Garretson had started out with three burros on a haphazard health-seeking jaunt about the desert, so he stated, but sidewinders had taken toll of two of them.

Despite his six feet of rugged-looking stature, the young man complained that he was ill, and he was anxious to reach Wickenburg ahead of the peak of the hot weather, which, in that early June period, was already mercilessly intense at midday.

Dad and Jim generously lent him one of their burros. They called the wise little beast "Water Witch," because she knew every seep and water hole in that wide desert region. She always took the lead on a trip, and, if there happened to be a trickle or a tank within the day's march, she shaped her course toward it as true as a bee homing from a flower.

Garretson rested at the camp for a couple of days, during which he nosed about inquisitively and asked many absurd questions, after the manner of tenderfeet, and then one morning he started on his way and was soon swallowed up in the heave of the gaunt hills.

CHAPTER II.

AFRAID OF HIMSELF.

WHEN the rich pocket had been sacked clean, with never a color left in the devastated hole, Dad and Jim divided the treasure, each taking as nearly an equal share as could be determined by means of their crudely fashioned balance. It was Jim's suggestion that the division be made right there on the spot, although the older man protested that he could see no sense in it. It would be time enough after they

reached Wickenburg, he insisted; but Jim had his way about it.

The burros were in the brush corral, tools were safely hidden away, and the camp equipment had been assembled in readiness for an early-morning start across the Arizona desert, with Wickenburg as the objective. Dad and Jim were lounging on the ground in the cool of the desert night, smoking their pipes.

"I've been thinking things over, Dad," Jim remarked abruptly, after a long silence. "Thanks to your wise head and trained eyes, we've got a stake now, you and I; about ten thousand each, if your estimate is correct."

"It's purty nigh correct, son," Dad mumbled drowsily.

"Anyhow, it's a comfortable sockful," returned Jim. "You and I have been pecking around the hills together for something more than five years now. We've had our ups and downs and our little squabbles, just as two men always do who rough it together. You're the best old scout in the world, Dad, but now we've got to dissolve partnership—at least, for the present."

"What's that, son?" Dad asked, starting up suddenly, for he had been half asleep.

"I said that you and I have got to split up." Jim's voice was husky, and his words stumbled a little.

"Ain't nothin' wrong, are they, Jim?" Dad inquired, with a nervous gulp. "You don't think I gypped you none in weighin' up the values, do you?"

Jim shook his head. "Nothing of the sort. Fact is, I'm pretty sure that I got the big end of the split. And—yes; there's something wrong. So in the morning when we start out, you just hit the trail for Wickenburg with your share, taking two of the burros and two of the water kegs, and I'll head straight across for Quartzite with the other two burros and the other two kegs. I won't need but one blanket, and I want to go as light as possible; so I'll cache out my bed. I'll take just enough grub to see me through, and all the rest of the stuff is yours to do with as you please. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

"Fair enough, and then some," Dad replied in a hurt tone. "But what's the

idee? Ain't I been on the squar' with you since we've been partners?"

"Just a little too square," Jim assured him quickly. "You've practically given me ten thousand in gold as my unearned share of the clean-up."

"I've give you nothin'!" Dad snapped with sharp emphasis. "What you got you earned. good and plenty. You done mighty nigh all the hard work takin' out the values, while I just loafed around and bossed the job. So you was actual entitled to more'n half; but you're so dadburned contrary you won't never listen to reason."

"You found the pocket, didn't you?"

"No; me an' you together run onto it just accidentallike."

"All right; have it your way." Jim was helpless against the old man's inexorable logic. "Anyhow, my labor wasn't worth a tenth part of what I got for it. However, as things stand, you and I have each got around ten thousand. So now, when we start out in the morning, we'll go separate ways. I'm not going to travel with you, with that much gold in the packs. It'd be taking too great a risk."

"Now lookit here, Jim Cullom!" Dad bounced to his feet and shook an angry fist at his partner. "Do you mean to insinooate that I'd be low-down enough to crack you on the head while you was asleep, and then grab your pesky little pile and run?"

"Not for a minute!" Jim laughed uneasily. "I'd trust you with ten thousand times ten thousand, Dad. It's not you that I'm afraid of, but myself."

"Yourself?" Dad eyed him shrewdly. "Just what're you gettin' at, son?"

"Just this," Jim replied, clearing his throat. "A fellow never knows what the sight of gold's going to do to him. Somehow, its glitter has a way of blinding the moral sense of lots of folks, and I might show up as belonging to that particular breed. I don't know. This is the first time in my life that I've ever been tested, and the temptation might, in the end, get the best of me. I've simply got to sidestep it for the sake of both of us. For that reason, I won't take any chances on myself by traveling with you and your ten thousand. That's just the way I

feel about it, Dad, and it's only fair to you that you should be told."

"You're a dadburned, cockeyed fool!" Dad settled himself back on the ground with a grunt of disgust. "Why, son, if I had all the gold in the world, I'd trust you with it and never bat an eyelash."

"And you'd probably wake up and curse yourself for being such a blithering idiot." Jim laughed dryly. "Fact is, I'm afraid you're taking a big chance right now, with no more than your little old ten thousand within reach of my itching palm."

"Not with good old Sam Cullom's boy," Dad proclaimed with stout faith. "As you know, me an' your dad was partners for more'n ten years, son, and he never done a mean trick in his life. It just wasn't in him. And you're like him clean through. I reckon I know you better'n you know yourself, boy."

"My father's honor can't serve as a guarantee of my conduct," Jim contended. "Anyhow, if you and I should travel together, we'd both be taking chances, with that much gold between us, and I simply won't listen to it. The thought of how easy it'd be for me to double my stake might persist until it drove me nutty and led me to knock you on the head and then skip with all the boodle. I won't take the risk; that's all. We can meet in Prescott later on and celebrate in proper style, after the money's safe in the bank."

"You're nutty as sin right this minute!" Dad was growing vexed. "You're just about as li'ble to do a low-down trick like that as your old dad is to hop out of his grave and crack me. Besides, you want to remember that you ain't desert-broke none too good. You get twisted pow'ful easy when you're out in the greasewood and sand; and if you was to tackle Old Man Desert all by yourself, 'specially right now when he's just beginnin' to get riled up proper and is feelin' his oats, he'd just about jab his claws into you and clean up on you."

"I'll take a chance on Old Man Desert rather than myself," Jim avowed.

"Huh!" Dad grunted. "He'd nab you before you got a good start, dadburn you, and you know it as well as me. Two kegs won't carry you far, and you'd

just about miss what little water there is between here and Quartzite. You want to remember that you wouldn't have old Water Witch to help you out if you got in a tight place."

"It was a mistake to let that tender-foot take the old girl," Jim remarked.

"The feller was porely and had to have help to get out," Dad defended.

"True enough; but one of the other burros would have served him just as well," Jim reminded him.

"Well, she's done gone, and I reckon we'll be lucky if he leaves her at Wickenburg for us, as he promised. Anyhow, son, if there was any chance that you'd be covetin' my share o' the stake, you wouldn't be waitin' till we got movin' to grab it."

"Think not?"

"No, sir-ee! You'd try to turn the little trick before we ever hit the trail at all. Howsoever, you'd be askeert to tackle it, even if you was low-down enough to get it into your head to do it, which, of course, you ain't. You know cussed well that I'd be sure to get you if you made any bad breaks. So put them notions outn your fool head. We're goin' to hit the trail for Wickenburg together, me an' you, even if I have to herd you along in front o' me at the p'int o' my gun. So there you are!"

CHAPTER III.

HEARD TO BELIEVE.

DAD'S will prevailed in the end. They would start out together at dawn and travel in the cool of the mornings and evenings, perhaps at night, resting in some friendly shade through the hot, midday hours.

Jim Cullom went to his bed, which was a hundred yards or more removed from Dad's, just around a point where an ancient slide had piled up a mass of huge rocks at the foot of the slope. Jim always spread his blankets at a convenient distance from Dad, who snored atrociously.

Jim's share of the gold was in two stout ore bags up at his bed, while Dad's, also done up in ore bags, lay carelessly on the ground close to the assembled camp equipment.

Dad rolled himself in his blanket, with no roof above him save the sky; both men always slept in the open. The night wind was refreshingly cool and soothing, and he was soon in a profound sleep.

He came violently awake with a suffocating sensation. He snatched at the blanket which had crawled up over his head; then a heavy knee almost crushed in his chest, and a hard grip caught his flailing arms. In a trice a rope was twisted about his joined wrists.

"Jim! You dadburned fool! What're you up to?" The blanket that was wound about Dad's head muffled his sharp rebuke.

A big hand grabbed his spindly legs. He kicked and squirmed in desperate protest against the binding of his ankles, but his resistance was futile. His assailant withdrew after completing the trussing up. Dad rolled about and contorted himself in a straining campaign to free himself of his bonds, but there was no yield to those gnawing twists of hemp.

In a little while he heard the approach of heavy footfalls, accompanied by the clatter of burros' hoofs among the rocks which littered the foot of the slope. The burros were halted at the camp; then followed sounds of hurried rummaging and packing.

"Jim!" Dad mumbled into the tight folds of the blanket. "What the Sam Hill's come over you, son? Why—you can't do a he-nious thing like this! Not you, Jim! Not good old Sam Cullom's boy!"

There was no answer. The busy sounds of hasty packing continued. Dad swore savagely as he struggled to throw off the multiple folds about his head and the painful grip on wrists and ankles.

"Jim Cullom!" he pleaded in a frenzy of alarm and indignation. "If you ain't just playin' one of your fool jokes on your old partner—if the devil's got into you and you mean what you're up to—then kill me decent and don't sneak off and leave me this a way. And—say, Jim! If you're actual goin', be sure and don't forget the water. You want to recollect that Old Man Desert's one feller you can't hog up!"

He heard the smack of a stick on burros' backs, followed by the sound of

stumbling hoofs. In a few seconds there was silence.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INVALUABLE ALLY.

FOR a long time Dad lay gulping for breath. So the thing that his partner had feared, and which Dad had scoffed at, had come to pass. The devil of avarice had found ascendancy in Jim Cullom, and, along with it, the devil of murder, its coworker in evil, had revealed itself in its most hideous and frightful aspect.

The swift perversion of his partner appalled Dad Maguire. A violent sense of repulsion arose in him against the yellow substance which had power thus to stifle manhood and transform, in so brief a space, a rational human being of fine parts and high honor into an irrational, slinking, predatory beast.

It seemed incredible that clean-souled Jim Cullom, so strong and yet so gentle, could have made that swift plunge into iniquity. Dad turned so sick at heart at thought of his partner's perfidy that he was ready to welcome quick death. If the world had reached such a sorry pass that gold had become its standard of morals, making evil so rife in it as to debauch even good old Sam Cullom's boy, then it was high time to be getting out of it.

And, indeed, Dad seemed destined to leave it shortly, whether he willed his exit or no. If he could not succeed in redeeming himself of his bonds, so that he could tear away that smothering blanket in whose folds his head was securely enwrapped, the next day's frying sun would make short work of the job. The thought of the impending torture, coupled with a rising wrath against his faithless partner, moved him to action.

He squirmed about until he managed to gain his knees. He thought of the sharp butcher's knife which had been left lying on the crude camp table after the supper dishes had been cleaned up. If he could find it, it would minister to his dire needs.

He was denied all sense of direction; but he groped about on his shuffling knees until he found the table. It was bare. Butcher's knife and everything else

which had been left on it, ready for an early breakfast, had been removed.

Then he bethought himself of the ax, which, he remembered, had been left sticking in a mesquite chunk at the woodpile, a short distance removed from the table. Jim might have overlooked the ax in his precipitate haste to get away.

It seemed an eternity before Dad found the woodpile; but his efforts were amply rewarded. The ax was still there. It took him but a few seconds to release himself and tear off the blanket.

There was no moon. He stumbled back to his bed for a match, for he often awoke in the night hungry for a smoke, and he always kept pipe, tobacco, and matches under his pillow. He found the matches, struck one to flame, and took a hurried inventory.

His two bags of gold were gone. He had expected that. A portion of the grub, too, had been taken, but rather a meager share. The plates, knives, and forks which had been left on the table had been tossed carelessly among the camp stuff, which, apparently, had not been plundered. It was evident that the burros had been packed light for the sake of a little extra speed, if a burro is ever capable of extra speed in any circumstances.

Dad returned to his bed, intending to dress and start at once in pursuit of the fugitive; but his overalls and shoes were gone. So was his gun. The crafty thief had planned to make pursuit impossible in case his victim should succeed in extricating himself from the binding twists of rope. Dad had slept in his shirt, so, fortunately, that much covering was left to him.

The old prospector, however, was not dismayed. He had a pair of cast-off shoes somewhere in the assembled miscellany. He found them after a hurried search; also a pair of ragged overalls. His hat he had placed on a near-by rock before retiring, and it was still there.

In a little while he was dressed. He hurried up to Jim's bed. It was empty, just as he had expected, although he had nursed a feeble hope that he would find it otherwise. He would rather have looked upon his partner stark in death

than upon that abdicated bed. In a swift appraisal he saw that one of the blankets was gone; and Jim's bags of gold, of course, had vanished.

Dad noticed that the trail of the burros passed close to Jim's bed, then swung sharply out into the desert. He did not try to follow it then, for, with the failing sight of his years, the darkness baffled him; but he took careful observation of its course, which was due westward, straight toward Quartzite.

He felt the need of fortifying his strength with a snatch of breakfast and a cup or two of strong coffee before beginning the chase. He wanted the coffee most of all, but when he went to the water pail he discovered that it had been tipped over and its contents spilled out onto the ground.

He was sure that Jim must have taken the four water kegs, which had been stowed in the shade behind a rock a few yards back from camp after they had been filled the day before at the sluggish seep spring, a mile or more away. He shambled up to the spot in a perfunctory sort of way, and was amazed to find all the kegs in their place.

"I'm sure pow'ful much obliged, Jim, for that little slip," Dad muttered with satisfaction. "But you're just about seventeen different kinds of a fool to be temptin' Old Man Desert that a way. He'll be real tickled to meet your acquaintance without no water, he will for sure! I'll just hop onto your trail, and I'll come up to you pronto."

Dawn broke, with its pageant of desert color, while Dad was eating his hastily prepared breakfast. Close on the heels of the first brilliant flashes came sporadic spurts of wind. By the time he had gulped down his third cup of coffee and had filled a large canteen from one of the kegs, the blow had steadied and stiffened. Then, after a few minutes, it died down almost as abruptly as it had risen. Dad had feared a sandstorm; but with the laying of the dawn gusts, that dread threat passed.

There had been enough of the unfriendly wind, however, to militate against Dad's purpose. The desert waves that it had stirred had completely obliterated the fugitive's trail. But, un-

daunted, the grim old prospector started off across the sands while they still lay cool after the night's breath had sucked out their fire. He had sighted the cubs, and that was quite enough for him.

He was weaponless, but that gave him no concern. Old Man Desert, gaunt, crafty, and remorseless, was his ally. Whosoever presumes to defy Old Man Desert and his kindred folk do so without reckoning the cost.

CHAPTER V.

NO ALTERNATIVE.

THE desert sands soon forfeited their early-morning coolness. Noon found the wide waste across which Dad was passing, with its crass growths and slithering things, a fiery furnace. But he did not falter.

He had seen no sign of the fugitive, and he began to feel the prick of disquieting misgivings. There was nothing to tell him that he was within miles of the trail. He was simply going ahead blindly, with only the needle of his mental compass as his guide.

Jim had led out due westward in the beginning of his guilty flight, but there was no assurance that he had not suddenly swung off in some other direction after going a short distance. However, he had hardly feared pursuit, with all the precautions which he had taken against it, and a more or less straight line toward Quartzite seemed to be the most probable, and so Dad tenaciously held to his original course.

He was frugal with his scant water supply, but it was diminishing alarmingly. He had not counted on so long a chase. He had expected to come up to Jim by noon, at the latest. Jim had a start of some four or five hours, it is true; but, without water, such a lead meant but little on the desert. Dad began to grow uneasy. He could not understand why he had not sighted the slow-moving pack outfit anywhere in that wide sweep of scintillating sand.

Then, along in the middle of the afternoon, he took cognizance of companies of buzzards that were patrolling a bare spot off to his right. That was a sinister portent on the desert, and, with a dreadful

fear clawing at his throat, he turned off to investigate.

A quarter of a mile away he sighted a suspicious-looking bulk lying on the sand; but when he came up to it he was relieved to find that the object was a dead burro, and it was significant that it was one that had belonged in his and Jim's outfit. Dad was puzzled to find that the burro had been shot; but, more perplexing still, were two bursted water kegs that were lying near by.

"The critter must 'a' been laggin' some and holdin' him back, so he got shet of it," Dad observed judiciously. "But them bu'sted kegs beat me. We've got only four all told, and he never took a single one of 'em. I reckon he must 'a' picked up a few on the quiet from some o' them passin' desert rats, and then cached 'em out som'ers so's to be all sot for this here pe'tickler job. It sure looks like he's been fixin' for his sneakin' trick all along; and now, come to think of it, I noticed that he's been actin' sort o' queer for a right smart spell."

Dad shook his head sadly and heaved a deep sigh. "I'm sure terrible dissapp'inted in Jim. I never 'lowed that good old Sam Cullom's boy'd go wrong that a way, and me always treatin' him just like he was my own, too. Anyhow, I'm now on his trail for sure, and I'm bound to ketch up with him before long. Howsoever, that critter's been dead some two-three hours, I'd say, which means that I'm still a right smart piece behind him."

The trail was now plain enough, and Dad noticed that it angled off sharply at the dead burro and struck straight toward a jumble of rocks at the foot of a curving ridge some three or four miles distant. A little farther on he found another dead burro, and another still but a few yards beyond it. Both had been shot. A bursted water keg lay close to the farther carcass.

"He's got only one critter left now," Dad remarked grimly. "Can't tote much on one measly burro. He must 'a' killed them others off so's to save water. Seems like he's been real reckless with his water, with them three kegs cleaned out already and him not even havin' a good start. I just don't savvy why he wants to bu'st his kegs and kill the critters that

a way. A feller that gets that reckless sure ain't goin' to get very far."

He stopped abruptly and studied the trail with a perplexed scowl.

"Now hold on here! What does this mean?" He stooped and scrutinized the trail closely. "I don't just savvy this. Here's still the tracks o' three burros, and he had only four to start with, and three of 'em's back yander, clean done for."

He snapped himself erect and started on with angry stride. "Why, dadburn his ornery hide, I reckon I'm beginnin' to see things now. He had a couple of extry critters cached out som'ers, along with them water kegs. He must 'a' had everything cut and dried sure enough, and he worked off that hypercritin' speech of hisn last night just to throw sand in my eyes."

He followed the trail into the jumble of massive rocks which littered the cove made by the crescent-shaped curve of the ridge. He had never been there before, and he was quite sure that this particular area must also be strange to Jim. He surmised that Jim had turned off into it for the sake of its abundant shade during the hot hours.

Dad was sure that he was now close on the fugitive's heels. He dreaded the inevitable meeting, not that he feared Jim's deadly rifle and six-shooter, but he shrank from the potential fury of his own wrath, which had risen in the same ratio as the fierce desert heat.

He knew that he would have to kill Jim. He could see no alternative. But the hard prospect wrenched at his heart. It would be a dreadful thing to have to kill good old Sam Cullom's boy, that boy whom the father had intrusted into his charge.

Dad gave no thought to the fact that he himself was weaponless. He was a desert creature; the crafty and sinister denizens of the out-back places—slithering reptiles, savage birds, and skulking beasts—had long been his tutors, and from them he had learned wisdom and cunning. He could slip around among the rocks ahead of Jim as stealthily as a coyote, could wait in hiding for his chance, and then could strike with the swift, unexpected deadliness of a rattler. So let Jim have his guns and welcome.

As the crucial moment grew nearer and nearer with inevitable sureness, Dad's fortitude in his pursuit of vengeance began to waver. He found himself making all manner of excuses for his delinquent partner. Surely Jim was not himself. The desert heat had temporarily warped his brain. Besides, he was old Sam Cullom's boy, good old Sam Cullom who had tramped the hills and desert sands with him for half a score of years, and who more than once had saved him from mortal peril—

Then he halted in amazement.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN A GREAT LIGHT BROKE.

ALL Dad's desert cunning had availed him nothing. He came upon Jim unexpectedly, and then followed a mortal conflict, but not a conflict such as Dad had anticipated.

Jim was lying face down in the broiling fire of the sun. A .45-70 rifle lay close to one of the extended hands, and near by was a tattered blanket. Jim was clothed only in his scant underwear. Rags of blanket material, which had been improvised moccasins, were tied about his feet, which, as well as his legs and body, were pitifully blistered and swollen.

"Merciful Heaven, what's happened to you, Jim?" All of Dad's black wrath dissipated before an overwhelming surge of pity as he dropped to his knees beside the prostrate man. He rolled the still form over and lifted the lolling head. The puffed lips quivered stiffly, but no sound passed them. The eyelids twitched. At least Jim was still alive.

Dad succeeded in dragging the inert weight into the shade of a near-by rock. There was still a little water in his canteen. It was warm, almost hot, but it was water. There was no longer murder in Dad's heart. He was the good Samaritan now, fired with a holy zeal to minister to a fellow creature in mortal agony.

He pried apart the swollen lips and sent a tiny trickle cautiously into the parched throat. Little by little life came creeping back; but it was dusk before Jim was able to articulate fragmentary speech; and the canteen had been drained of its last drop.

"Water!" Jim mumbled.

Dad's lips twitched pathetically as he turned away from the pleading eyes, which burned in their hollow sockets.

"Water!" Jim muttered again.

"It's tough on you, Jim, but it's all—cleaned out," Dad said thickly.

He had denied himself to save his partner, and already his tongue was swollen until it almost filled his mouth.

"Water——" Jim feebly tried to lift an impotent hand and failed.

"Tain't no use, son," Dad growled savagely. "We're done for, me an' you. Old Man Desert's got his claws on us, and he's fixin' to do his rippin'. I ought never to 've brung you back, just to go through it all ag'in. But don't you worry none. He won't be long finishin' the job. I'll just stick to you, Jim, and we'll hit the trail together—acrost the way your good old dad went. Tain't far now, and he'll be real glad to see us both, I reckon."

Delirium was beginning to lay hold on his brain. He was floating out upon high, splashing waves.

Jim shook his head weakly. "Water—Witch—leading—follow—trail——"

Dad jerked himself out of that misty sea. "Water—Witch?" He staggered to his feet. "She——"

"Turned off—sharp—back few miles—come straight—across——"

"I savvy, Jim!" With his brain reeling, Dad snatched up the canteen and staggered a pace. "Rest easy, son. I'll follow her—and don't you move! I'll be back pronto—and if the old girl's failed us—we'll hit the long trail together. S'long, Jim!"

He picked up the trail again and went forward on a stumbling run. He was without sensation. It was as though his feet clove to billowing vapor, with a cool sea breeze sweeping him on.

He had gone hardly a quarter of a mile when he rounded a huge rock and stumbled over an unconscious man lying prone in the sun. His feet came back to earth when he arose.

"That tenderfoot—Garretson!" he muttered, as he dragged the still form into the shade. "So him and Jim had this job all fixed up between 'em, dad-burn 'em!"

A blatant blast of sound shivered his brain back to work. He looked up, and then a hoarse whoop tore at his raw throat. There, less than twenty yards away, were old Water Witch and two other burros. Water Witch was industriously digging in the sand, like a dog at a prairie-dog hole, and already the excavation was almost deep enough to hide her shoulders. The wise old burro stopped digging, then got down on her knees and held her head in the hole for a long time.

She backed out, with her mouth dripping little streams of moisture, and when her two companions crowded forward she trumpeted her discovery in a prolonged burresque blast.

"The old girl's struck it for sure! A regular glory hole!" Dad heaved as he stumbled on lumberingly; and then a great light broke upon him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REASON WHY.

THE cool, sweet water from that ancient Indian well, which had lain hidden beneath a blanket of desert sand for time beyond the knowledge of white men until Water Witch had smelled it out, was an antidote for the desert's stings. It quickly brought back life to Dad, and he was able to bring relief to the two devastated bodies that had suffered so cruelly. The fresh night breeze aided him in his work of mercy.

"I reckon you can hold the prisoner stiddy, Jim, while I strike acrost to our old camp in the cool o' the night for enough grub to see us through until you and him are fittin' to hit the trail," said Dad after he had made his two patients force down a few mouthfuls of food, despite their protests. "I don't find no more'n enough in the packs to last but a couple o' meals, and it's goin' to be some days before you 'n' him's in shape to tackle Old Man Desert ag'in."

"I can hold him all right, Dad," Jim replied.

There was a long silence. Dad arose and scowled down at Jim. "You sure was one dadburned big fool for tryin' to trail the feller all by yourself, without no water or nothin'," he scolded. "You

ought to 've come right down and untied me the minute you broke loose."

"I thought you'd be all right till I got back," Jim explained, "for I expected to catch up with him in a hurry, and I didn't want to lose a moment. I sawed myself loose on a sharp rock soon after he got started. He happened to overlook my rifle, which I had hidden under my bed. It helped me check him, for without it I couldn't have got those burros—and spilled his water."

"But why didn't you shoot the feller himself?" Dad growled.

"He was riding old Water Witch—in the lead; I was firing at long range, and was afraid I'd shoot low," Jim explained.

"Uh-huh," Dad grunted. "I savvy. Old Man Desert sure'd got a handful if you'd dropped old Water Witch. Some burro, that old girl. And how about you, Jim? Have you got over that feelin'?" Do you reckon I can trust you with my little pile while I whack them three burros acrost to our camp for the grub?"

"I guess I'm safe enough." Jim smiled wanly. "I'd have given up the chase, when I began to feel myself going under, if it hadn't been for the thought of your stake being sneaked off like that. I was ready to let mine go; but I was determined to save yours, if I could, even if I had to go through fire to do it."

"You went through fire, all right, son, but you sure saved the pile," Dad praised him warmly. "But don't you never tackle Old Man Desert that a way ag'in—not for all the gold in the world, don't you do it. You just leave them kind o' jobs to me. Anyhow, when the pinch come, you sure showed that you was old Sam Cullom's boy, Jim, dadburn your blistered hide if you didn't. And I'm proud of you, son, I tell you! I'm proud of you!"

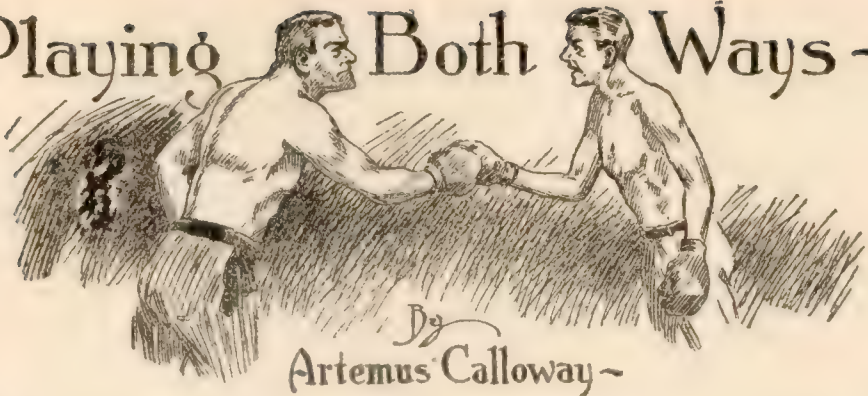
Sounding Him

FATHER," said four-year-old Phyllis. "I want to ask you a very important question."

"What is it, dear?" queried her father.

"Well," continued the small maid thoughtfully, "to-morrow's my birthday, and I'd like to know what you think I'd like to have for a present."

Playing Both Ways ~



TO Colonel Estrada, Francisco Davila had never seemed particularly likable. When the colonel's daughter, Isabella, became interested in that young man, her father's dislike rapidly developed into rabid hate. The colonel became almost violently insistent that Isabella immediately marry Justo Gomez.

"Justo Gomez," declared Isabella, "is a gambler."

"But," remarked her father, "he has money with which to gamble."

"He is a drunken pig."

"With the money to buy his drinks," the colonel reminded her, "while this Francisco has nothing but a small salary. He is a fool."

Isabella shook her pretty little head. "I think him very wise. He says I am a wonderful girl."

Just why Colonel Estrada did not swear, he never knew; he wanted to, and the colonel usually did very much as he pleased. He may have realized that swearing would do no particular good and that it might possibly prove harmful. His task, despite his bluster, was no easy one. "Humph! Any fool knows that."

A queer little smile crept over Isabella's face. "So? Only a fool thinks I am wonderful?"

"No—no." The colonel saw that he was dangerously near serious trouble. "I meant nothing of the kind—and you know it. I meant that even as great a fool as Francisco would have to know that." Colonel Estrada glanced about him, twisted his long, black mustache. "You will marry Justo Gomez."

"But, father," protested the girl, "I care nothing for Justo Gomez."

The colonel gave a more vicious jerk at his facial adornment. "It is not necessary that you care for him. In this country the daughter marries the man her father selects."

"Not this daughter!" flashed Isabella. "I know that is the custom of our people, but I have learned things. There are the families of the Americanos across the river—the people who work for the big fruit company that ships bananas to the Estados Unidos—those girls chose their own husbands."

"A-ah! The Americano swine. They know nothing; I care not for them."

The girl gazed down the narrow dusty street toward the coconut grove at the eastern edge of the town, then out above the low buildings standing between her and the Caribbean. Her eyes could not see the beach, but her ears caught the sound of restless waves ever beating on the sand, waves as restless as her thoughts. She wanted to marry Francisco Davila—and Francisco Davila wanted to marry her; and her father said such a union must not be. Isabella had ever been a dutiful daughter; she felt that she could not marry without the consent of her father; independence was strong within her, but centuries-old tradition and custom were stronger. The daughter must obey the parent—in the matter of marriage. Her father would never willingly consent to her marriage with Francisco. Therefore she must give him up, must marry the despised Justo Gomez. It was the custom. How she hated custom!

Meanwhile, Francisco Davila's thoughts were far from pleasant. He had been told by Colonel Estrada that he must remain away from the Estrada home, that he must not see Isabella.

Francisco thought the colonel most unjust. The young man realized that he was not wealthy, but he held a good position with the largest native-owned store in Puerto Arturo. Some day he would have his own business, a small one, perhaps, but a business nevertheless. Justo Gomez, however, was wealthy, owned a large plantation. Colonel Estrada wanted money in his family; he possessed but little of that very necessary evil.

II.

RECENTLY there had drifted up from the Canal Zone a group of American boxers. Business, it seemed, was rather dull for gentlemen of their profession down on the big ditch, and they had heard that there was much money changing hands in the Republic of Yorando. The fruit company was building a railroad into the interior; there was construction work; many men were employed. Like countless gamblers and others believing in quick profits they had come to Puerto Arturo. The majority of the Americans in and near the little town welcomed the opportunity again to see gloved gladiators in action. Many Yorandons became regular patrons at the well-staged "grudge" fights.

At last Francisco Davila had become enamored with the pastime. He was a frequent spectator and an admirer of the fighters. After a time he became friendly with a featherweight who was persuaded to give him some lessons in the gentle art of boxing. It was while Johnny Stott and Francisco were going through a lesson in the annex of the Hotel International, which was where the fights were held, that Colonel Estrada walked in and surprised his would-be son-in-law.

"I heard what was happening," said the colonel, "and wanted to learn the truth for myself. I am astonished that you should be indulging in the low sport of the Americanos. From this time forward you will think no more of marrying my daughter. I will have no son-in-law who

associates with the box fighters of the north."

"But," stammered Francisco, "you—you attend the fights!"

"I do," admitted the colonel. "I watch others do many things which I would not do myself. Keep away from my home!"

In vain did Francisco plead and argue. His words fell on deaf ears. The colonel departed to deliver the ultimatum to his daughter.

While none of the fighters ranked very high at home, they all made a pretty fair showing in the tropics, where men who fight with their fists are few. They all did fairly well in a financial way with the single exception of "Patsy" O'Dell.

Patsy was the only heavyweight boxer in the republic, and a fighter with no one to fight isn't usually a very wealthy gentleman, especially one who has never advanced beyond the preliminaries in the fight cities of the States. True, O'Dell did know a little something about poker and managed to pick up some money in that way. Also, he kept in pretty fair condition by assisting his friends in their training.

It was half a week after the conversation of Colonel Estrada and Francisco that the colonel found his daughter in the store where Señor Davila was employed. She was engaged in earnest conversation with that young man. Colonel Estrada was more than angry. He took his daughter home, then returned to converse once again with Francisco.

The debate was a stormy one, and when the colonel left, he was more angry than ever. Two blocks from the store he met Patsy O'Dell. Patsy was a large man. The colonel had heard that he was a fighter. A large man should be able to deliver a powerful blow. From somewhere there came to the colonel a thought so wonderful that he smiled for the first time in hours. He invited Patsy O'Dell into a cantina for a drink.

Two hours later the colonel was back at the store to see Francisco.

"I have a plan," Estrada growled.

"You have?"

"You think you are such a fine fighter at the box——"

"You mean boxing?"

"Ye-es. Whatever it is that the bar-

barians from the north call their game. I have a proposition."

"What is it?"

"You want to marry my daughter, and I have other plans for her. I desire that she wed Justo Gomez."

"Justo Gomez is no fit mate for her. He drinks much—gambles——"

"He will make a better husband than you. He has money."

"He won't have it long. The way he is living——"

The colonel swelled like an angry house cat. "Enough! As I said, I don't want you to marry my daughter. You cannot come to my home, but she is willful. Until she is married to Justo, I don't know what she might do. Or until you give me your word that you will never speak to her again——"

"I will never do that! I will keep away from your home, of course, but if I see your daughter I shall speak to her."

"H'm! We shall see. This is my plan. You think you are the fighter with the box——"

Francisco smiled. "I fight with gloves—for fun."

Colonel Estrada nodded. "This will be no fun. You will fight with Patsy O'Dell, the Americano. You shall fight twelve what they call the rounds—if you can. If you do—what they call it?—the knock him out, I withdraw all my objections; you may marry my daughter. If you do not—you are not to speak to her again!"

Francisco started. "Patsy O'Dell? He is a professional fighter. He weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. I weigh a hundred and twenty. He would kill me!"

"I hope he does," said the colonel grimly. "But if you are such a coward that you fear to tackle him——"

"I am not a coward," snapped Francisco, "but I have sense."

"And will save your precious body!"

The taunt stung. Francisco lost his head. "I will fight Patsy O'Dell! I will fight him—yes. Come, let us get witnesses to the agreement."

The witnesses were secured. Those witnesses knew that Colonel Estrada, despite his faults, would keep his word, that if Francisco succeeded in knocking

out Patsy O'Dell he might marry Isabella, that if he lost, he must never see her again.

"And he will lose," said one. "Francisco is one grand large fool!"

III.

FROM that time until the fight two nights later Francisco Davila was trained by his friend Johnny Stott. "You ain't got a chance in the world," the little fellow told him, "but bein' as you're determined to be hammered to pieces, I'll do what I can for you. But Patsy'll put you away in the first round."

Francisco nodded. "But I've got to fight. Something might happen."

Johnny grunted. "It will. And it'll happen to you."

"I'll do my best. There might be a miracle. And you would do the same. If there were a girl you loved and this were your one chance——"

"I'd fight a ton of wild cats," declared Johnny.

"And I shall fight Patsy O'Dell," Francisco told him.

"The colonel is givin' Patsy fifty dollars to beat you up. An' Patsy'll kill three like you for that much money."

The night of the fight arrived. The hotel annex was filled. Johnny Stott was in Francisco's corner. Patsy O'Dell glared across the ring. The fight promoter was in high spirits. Many tickets had been sold.

Laughs of derision and groans of sympathy came as the two men shook hands. Then they returned to their corners to come out fighting. The gong sounded. O'Dell towered elephantlike. Francisco was like a jumping jack. He darted forward, landed a light right on the big fellow's arm and slipped away.

Francisco's friends cheered him. "That's it, Francisco! Hit him again!"

Colonel Estrada laughed. "Kill him, Señor Americano!" he called.

Patsy glanced at the colonel and grinned. Francisco landed again on O'Dell's arm.

O'Dell laughed, and caught Francisco full in the face, rocked him with a left jab. Francisco's nose suffered. He experienced a sudden dizzy feeling. From

then on until the end of the round he kept away from Patsy. Francisco was fast on his feet. He seemed to realize that the big man had intentionally touched him only lightly—lightly for O'Dell—that a real blow would put him down.

The second round was a foot race. Francisco was still determined to keep away from the American.

Colonel Estrada became enraged. "Stop and fight—coward!" he yelled.

"Bite him on the shin, Francisco," jeered an American employee of the fruit company.

"Slip up on him and stick a knife in him," came from another. "You don't know nothin' about fightin' with your fists."

There came other bits of advice. The majority of the crowd were there simply because of the unusual. There had been much talk during the past two days. Many were sorry for Francisco, but the thing did strike them as amusing, absurd, a good laugh. O'Dell wouldn't kill the fool, anyway. He would only put him to bed for a week or so.

Then Patsy slipped and fell. The referee counted six before he regained his feet. The gong sounded as he and Francisco raced about the ring.

The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth rounds were farces. Occasionally Francisco darted in and hit O'Dell on an arm or the shoulder. Twice Patsy slapped him soundly.

In the seventh round O'Dell got a side-wipe at Francisco which carried him to his knees, but like a flash the little fellow was up. In the eighth round the American hit the Yorandon whenever he desired, but didn't knock him out. He closed Francisco's right eye, flattened his nose, cut his mouth. He made the little fellow's face look as if it had been run through a meat grinder.

In the ninth round O'Dell seemed to be trying to break Francisco Davila's ribs. Why Francisco didn't fall no one knew.

"Knock him out an' stop the slaughter," begged some one. "You've already beat him half to death. You're killin' him. Knock the little fool out. He won't stop till you do."

O'Dell grinaed and nodded. He didn't

knock Francisco out that round, however. At the opening of the tenth Francisco could hardly rise, but he managed it somehow. O'Dell was but a moving shadow before him, a hazy, elusive shadow.

Francisco leaped. His right fist shot out, caught O'Dell under the jaw. His left landed over the heart. Patsy O'Dell went down—and remained down— He was counted out.

The house was in an uproar. None could understand it. Francisco had won by a knock-out. The little Yorandon crept to his corner, was carried to his dressing room. There he collapsed.

IV.

IT was three days before Francisco could leave his bed, and then he went direct to Isabella. Colonel Estrada kept his word. He raised no further objections.

"She is yours," he said to Francisco. "I don't know how you did it, but you knocked the Americano out. I believe there is something wrong somewhere. But I keep my word. Perhaps it is best. Justo Gomez has had bad luck. He lost his plantation and all his money at cards last night."

"You wonderful Francisco!" Isabella told the much-bruised man when he stood before her. "You won! I can't understand how you did—but you did. At first my father was very angry with the Americano. He paid him fifty dollars to give you a good beating."

Francisco smothered an exclamation as she placed a slender finger on his bruised face. "Yes?" said he. "And the Americano earned the money your father paid him. He gave me a good beating. But——" He smiled faintly. "He won, also, the hundred dollars I paid him to let me knock him out in the tenth round."

What Was Settled

I AM not worthy of you—not worthy," pleaded the man passionately. "I am not worthy of you——"

"All right, George, go ahead," interposed the girl, sweetly resigned. "We've got that much settled."

The Right of the Brave ~



By Hapsburg Liebe ~

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

THE PROBABLE REASON.



NOTIONLESS as a stone image, Linderman Abbott stood on the forward deck of his sun-baked and paintless little schooner, and stared hard at a distant mangrove-green shore that seemed suspended like a mirage between the bright blue sky and the brighter blue water. Back at the wheel, two men stood watching Abbott with as much interest as Abbott showed in watching the far-off shore.

"I know where we're going now, 'Long Distance,'" half whispered "Preacher" Brown. Little and wizened and sun-burned to the hue of weathered copper, Brown was a sea tramp.

"Whar?" drawled Long Distance Budd.

Budd was a Tennessee mountaineer that wanderlust had driven from his native habitat. Very tall and very slender, he was, and he spoke through a drooping mustache so thick that it muffled his voice.

"That there island ahead ain't nothing else but Lonesome Key," answered the garrulous Brown. "It's a whale of a big key, and it's got a old settlement on it. 'Thunderin' Jim' Moreland, a big and heardy Englishman, lives there, and he sure is boss o' this here section o' the

Florida Keys. He's got a daughter; and if she ain't a pippin, I ain't never seen one! Not that Lin Abbott ever cared a cankered counterfeit cent about wimmen, howsomever; don't get me wrong, old-timer."

"Any man likes wimmen," returned Long Distance Budd, "or else he ain't natchel. The' hain't no sech a thing as a woman hater, Preacher, i-god, I'm a-tellin' you!"

"Lin," Preacher Brown hastened to explain, "was borned on the Gulf, and all the wimmen he's ever seen was in Gulf seaports—Tampa, Galveston, New Orleans; they was mostly in dance halls, wearing their hearts on their sleeves like badges, all set to catch 'em a husband, and it hardly mattered who! They flattered him, and soft-soaped him, because he let loose o' money like it was hot, and Lin thinks all wimmen is like them. But if he wanted Thunderin' Jim Moreland's girl, Long Distance, he'd get her. Lin Abbott sure always gets what he wants."

Budd looked thoughtfully at the bright blue water that was slipping so silently past.

Preacher Brown went on—it was his everlasting garrulity that had given him his nickname: "And yet, I can't imagine why he's going to Lonesome Key unless it is the girl. He seen her two years ago

for the first time and the last, Long Distance. I remember plain that she turned up her nose at him then."

"Yeuh!" Long Distance Budd wisely smiled. "They allus do, at fust. Mebbe that's edzactly why he's a-goin' back. She didn't flatter him and soft-soap him, like them other wimmen done, and he liked her for that."

Brown put over a spoke. Budd dropped into a ragged canvas deck chair, and a dream settled down upon him, a dream of home—he saw a log cabin with grapevines running riot over it, a spring brook bordered with violets and buttercups, an old log spring house under a weeping-willow tree.

Linderman Abbott was an odd figure, and he lived life in an odd way. When he needed money, he picked up a cargo; when he didn't need money, he wandered here and there over the Gulf. The waters of the Gulf were always new. The keys, also, were always new. Abbott was as sunburned as his schooner, the *Imp*. His eyes were a viking blue, his hair a viking brown. He was twenty-four, slender and straight, all of six feet in height, hickory-strong, and amazingly quick. His friends idolized him, and his enemies hated him bitterly. Friends and enemies, however, were agreed on one point—Linderman Abbott fought his battles both fairly and terribly.

As the *Imp* drew near to Lonesome Key, those on board saw another sun-warped little sailing-vessel; it lay at anchor against a sun-warped little wharf that had been built on the boles of cabbage palms. The wharf was deserted, and heat waves shimmered upward from it almost like blue flames. Above the key's rim of grotesque and banyanlike mangrove towered the feathery heads of cabbage trees and coconut palms, and the painless spire of a church with a paintless cross above it.

At Abbott's order, Preacher Brown and Long Distance Budd let the rust-eaten anchor down half a cable length from the other schooner. Then Abbott drew up a small boat they had been towing, sprang into it, and was soon rowing shoreward alone.

"Yeuh!" Long Distance Budd grinned. "It's the girl!"

CHAPTER II.

WILLING TO WAIT.

THERE was no doubt Lonesome Key was a fitting name now for that big and flat, exceedingly fertile island. A colony of wealthy English people, idealists and dreamers all, had settled upon it twenty-five years before, calling it among themselves "Little England." They had planned to have a Utopia there, an Eden without a serpent, and they hadn't reckoned with the weaknesses of human nature. The little town had sprung up while the land was being cleared and set to plantations and groves of plantains and pineapples, avocados, and limes.

The colony prospered under its own government for ten years, and then loneliness and isolation began to get in their deadly work. Factions were born, and a tiny but bitter civil war was fought over an issue of really nothing. The defeated half, all that was left of it, went back to England, and soon all that was left of the victorious party followed—one by one, or two by two—with the exception of Thunderin' Jim Moreland and his one lone, motherless daughter; this man was no quitter, certainly. The Conchs of neighboring keys were responsible for Moreland's nickname. The big Englishman had the voice, as well as the courage, of a lion.

Then illness seized the kingly Thunderin' Jim and put him into his bed, and soon the jungle had begun to win its eternal fight for supremacy on Lonesome Key. Lin Abbott now found young trees and scrub and wild grasses growing in the coral-rock paving of the town's main street and choking the very doors and windows of every house in Little England except the house of the Morelands; even the street lamps were hidden under tangled masses of wild vines. There was a hanging silence, an abiding sadness, over the apparently deserted place.

Abbott walked up the coral-rock path that led to the Moreland veranda, which had a border of gorgeous and fragrant flowers; here alone did he see unmistakable signs of human existence. As he lifted a foot to the lower step, there appeared beside him, like an evil jinni, a huge red-haired and red-bearded man.

"What do you want here?" the giant demanded. He was bareheaded and barefooted and ragged. He couldn't have been more than forty. He was not Jim Moreland.

Abbott's high temper rose at the other's belligerent manner. He folded his sunburned arms, eyed the big man for a moment in silence, and then said quietly: "I've seen you somewhere before. I never forget a face. As for what I want here, that's none o' your business."

He turned to mount the veranda steps. The Goliath put a great hand on his arm, and he faced back.

"You can't see Jim Moreland," the big man growled. "He's been sick abed for a long time. Angela won't let even me see him, and you are not going to pester her; get me?"

"I think I'll see him, all right," replied Abbott.

Again he was about to mount the steps. The red giant caught his arm and jerked him rudely to the ground. Lin Abbott had drawn back to strike, when a feminine voice as clear in tone as a silver flute cut in with engaging sweetness and simplicity:

"What are you doing?"

Abbott looked toward the front doorway and saw framed in it the girl that had haunted his dreams, by day and by night, throughout two of his wild and boisterous years. She was dressed poorly, and her golden-brown hair hung down her back in a single thick plait, as little girls used to wear their hair. She was handsome, wholesome, neat, intelligent.

Linderman Abbott smiled a little and approached her. "Who," he asked rather awkwardly, indicating the surly Goliath by a jerk of his thumb, "is your watchdog?"

Angela Moreland glanced hurriedly toward the big man. Abbott saw a look of fear cross her countenance.

"That's 'Red Bill' Wolfenden," she answered, her voice now pinched and bleak. "He's the overseer of our plantation and groves—or was before the jungle got them. Why?"

"I've met him somewhere," Abbott told her. "I never forget a face. I want to see your daddy."

The girl stiffened, straightened, went a

little pale. "You can't see him, Lin Abbott," she replied with a firmness that bespoke desperation.

So she remembered him, remembered even his first name! It gave him much pleasure, but he did not show it outwardly, which was wholly like him. Why didn't she want him to see her father, old Thunderin' Jim? If he were seriously ill, even if he were dying, it couldn't hurt to see him!

Then Abbott frowned. It piqued him to have a woman stand between him and the slightest thing he wanted. True, he adored this woman, but—just the same, it piqued him. Always before he had got what he wanted; he had taken it. He moved closer to the doorway, expecting to see her step back. But she didn't step back. He eyed her hard. Their gaze met and locked. A moment of this, and Angela Moreland narrowed her sea-blue eyes.

"You can't see him," she repeated. There was a suggestion of iron in her voice now.

A sly movement in the living room behind her caught Lin Abbott's attention then. He saw a squatty old Seminole Indian woman in a gaudy dress, with an antique musket in her hands. Angela turned her head, and saw also.

"Don't shoot—yet, Chuckaluskee," quietly ordered the girl.

"Maybe it wasn't so important, my seeing your dad." The visitor smiled. "I just wanted to get acquainted with him all over again. My real reason for coming here, Angela, was to marry you."

The girl's eyes widened almost to perfect roundness. "Why, you—you *pirate!*" she said breathlessly. "You've got an immense amount of faith in yourself, now haven't you?"

"Anyway," Abbott told her easily, "that's what I came for. I stood it for two years, and then I decided. I'd love you to death, Angela. I'd work for you, and I'd fight for you. All I've got I'd give you, though I've got nothing much but the old schooner—but it would make us a living. We could sail right over to Key West and be married. To tell you the truth, I hoped I'd have to steal you, and I sure expected to do it—but not unless you wanted to go. I wouldn't steal

you, you understand—I wouldn't have you as a gift—if you didn't want to go."

It was a long speech for him. The reply came instantly.

"I certainly," stammered Angela Moreland, "d-d-don't want to go!"

Linderman Abbott's smile faded. But he seemed thoughtful, rather than disappointed.

"All right," he said slowly. "All right. Well, I'll wait around for a few days or years, and maybe you'll change your mind. I've read that women sometimes do change their minds."

She stared. He turned and left her, and as he passed Red Bill Wolfenden, the man scowled.

CHAPTER III.

MYSTERY ABROAD.

A LITTLE way down the grown-over street, opposite a big and paintless structure that had served as a town hall, eight men stood in a knot and watched Abbott as he walked toward the wharf; the eight had been workers on the Moreland estate, and they were now ragged, unshaven, disreputable-looking—and fully as disreputable as they looked. Abbott pretended that he didn't see them.

Night fell, and the moon—the huge and bright, somehow theatrical moon of the tropics—rose above Lonesome Key's mangrove rim and looked down as though in pity upon the dead town, the shattered dream of the would-be Utopians. From somewhere came a single night hawk's cry, like the last note of a distant steamer's siren; there was the incessant, bell-like hum of myriads of insects, and now and then the weird *wak-wak* of a night heron.

Lin Abbott, lounging aboard his schooner, hadn't been able to forget for a moment the shadow of fear that had fallen over Angela Moreland's face at sight of Wolfenden. He guessed that dire mischief would stalk abroad very soon, and he guessed remarkably well. Again he sprang from the old vessel's rail to the small boat and rowed himself ashore alone, and this time he landed half a mile from the wharf.

"Yeuh!" said Long Distance Budd to Preacher Brown. "Yeuh! It's the girl."

An oil lamp burned somehow sadly in the living room of the girl's home, Abbott noted as he approached silently. He tiptoed to the front door. Chuckaluskee, the Indian woman, at once confronted him with the muzzle of the old musket.

"No can!" she exclaimed.

"I've got to see Thunderin' Jim," Lin Abbott declared in a soft voice. "I think there's something wrong here, and I want to help. I've got to see Thunderin' Jim."

"No can!" clipped Chuckaluskee. She cocked the musket.

"Then I want to see the girl," Abbott said impatiently.

"No can!"

He asked her a dozen questions. So far as he was able to find out, Chuckaluskee knew but two words of English; she was adamant.

Puzzled, somewhat disgruntled, Abbott made his way down the street, watching and listening as he went. The very atmosphere held a menace, a mysterious something that penetrated him like an electric current. He passed the old municipal building, which was as dark and still as a tomb, and soon found himself at a corner of the high-spired old English church.

Two men, one of whom undoubtedly was Red Bill Wolfenden, were coming leisurely up a path that had been worn through the wild growth of the coral-paved street. Abbott stole back and hid himself in the rank scrub that grew beside a church window. As the pair passed, Abbott overheard Wolfenden say guardedly to his companion:

"—must be more than three, and the skirt has got it. The only thing on earth, in Heaven, or in Hades that Thunderin' Jim was ever afraid of——"

The beginning and the end of it were lost to Abbott. He frowned. More than three—what? And what was the only thing in existence that Jim Moreland was ever afraid of?

The two went on toward the dark municipal building; though Abbott had no means of knowing it, they had quarters there, in company with the rest of the cutthroat gang.

Abbott straightened, and quite by chance peered in at the church window. In a slanting shaft of moonlight that

poured through a high window in the rear, he saw a lone and still figure kneeling at the dusty chancel. It was, he knew at once, Angela Moreland.

Linderman Abbott's education was both limited and peculiar. He had seized it and fairly torn it from a few books that his sea-faring father had left aboard the *Imp*, books that held small mention of churches, religion, or even God. In his own way, young Abbott had sought to plumb the depths of infinity with a lead line of his own crude fashioning, and the inevitable failure had made him a little cynical, somewhat dissatisfied with the scheme of things, silent; but he was a proper, and not an unbeliever. That which convinced him that an infinity really existed for mankind, that mankind was not merely a mushroom growth was—oddly—the stars. Lin Abbott loved the stars; in a manner, he worshiped them. On thousands of still and lonely nights, they had been companions to him.

He stole around to the doorway, stole into the church and up to the chancel. Altogether without knowing why he did it, utterly without reasoning, he removed his hat and knelt there in the shaft of moonlight beside Angela.

She saw that his eyes were wide, bright, earnest.

"I didn't know where else to go to ask for help," she explained in a whisper. "Poor mother used to do this—alone, at night. I wonder if you—if you're the answer."

"Yes," Lin Abbott hazarded. "I am. Try me."

She rose from her knees, and so did he.

"Lin Abbott," she said then, "do you know what my father would do to you if you deceived me?"

"I can guess," Abbott replied. "But I won't fool you, Angela. I'm the answer—try me!"

"It's Red Bill Wolfenden and his men that I'm afraid of," she admitted, after a moment spent in scrutinizing him carefully. "Wolfenden stole all the money that father had saved for me. Father always had a fear of banks, though that's all he ever did fear. But Wolfenden still isn't satisfied; he thinks there's more

money, and that I've got it; he says that I must marry him, and go with him to Paris, where we're to have a wonderful time spending *my* money! It was three thousand dollars, all in gold pieces."

After a half-frightened glance toward the doorway, she went on: "If he thinks you're going to help me, Lin Abbott, he will kill you. There is no law here, you know."

"I wish," said Abbott, his viking-blue eyes sparkling, "that Red Bill would only try it!"

"He certainly will, if he knows," Angela said quickly. "I saw him kill a man once. He strangled him, and broke the bones in his body—it makes me sick, just to think of it now."

"I'll get your three thousand back from Wolfenden," Abbott declared. "I'll do it if I have to skin him alive and beat him up with his own hide. Why can't I see your daddy, Angela? Has he—has he lost his mind, or something?"

"Some day, I'll tell you, Lin," breathed the girl—"if you're faithful. You must trust me now. If I don't seem to trust you, please remember that nearly every man I've known has been bad."

Just as nearly all the women that Lin Abbott had known had not measured up to specifications.

She was standing close to him. There was in her eyes that which thrilled him strangely. Instinctively he reached for her.

Angela Moreland ran like a frightened doe down the half-dark aisle and was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

A WEIRD SALUTATION.

AFTER some thought, Abbott made his way out of the silent church. Once in the street, he noted that there was now a light in the old town hall, and he took a dependable-looking frontier-type revolver from inside his shirt and bent his footsteps in that direction.

In the main room, which had been pressed into use as a tribunal of justice after the fortunes of the ill-fated colony had grown to be turbulent, nine men sat or knelt on the floor under a hanging lamp that held a gallon of oil; they were throwing wooden dice for the golden coins

that old Thunderin' Jim had hoarded for his lone, loved daughter.

Red Bill Wolfenden was "banking" the game, and, for a wonder, he was losing; doubtless it was a bait. Having seen this through a window, Lin Abbott hastened back to his schooner for Preacher Brown and Long Distance Budd. He dared not risk defeat by making a single-handed effort to recover the girl's money, because of the girl.

When the nine disreputables saw Linderman Abbott, he stood calmly just inside a window, with his back against a wall, and held a frontier-type revolver trained upon them from a level with his right hip.

"Surprise party, eh?" sneered red-bearded Wolfenden, who sat flat on the floor with a little pile of gold between his knees.

"You guessed it," Lin Abbott quietly returned. "See how high you can reach, you rattlesnakes that robbed a woman!"

Kneeling and sitting, they put up their hands in perfect unison.

Abbott continued, snapping out each word: "I'm here to take three thousand dollars in gold money from you, and it doesn't matter much to me what I have to do to get it."

Without taking his piercing gaze from them, he jerked his head toward the door and spoke to his men: "All right, Preacher. Watch 'em, Long Distance."

With distinct pleasure, Brown sprang to the task of collecting, while Long Distance Budd stood by with a rifle. From hands, pockets, and the floor, Brown plucked shining yellow coins. The nine men assayed, roughly, a thousand dollars. The wizened little sea tramp tied it in a bandanna, and put it inside his shirt.

"Come across with the other two thousand, Red Bill," Lin Abbott commanded sharply.

"What'll you do," Wolfenden snarled, "if I don't?"

"But you will," Abbott replied confidently. "You see, I never forget a face, and I remember now exactly where it was that I saw you—you crawling, big red rattlesnake!"

Wolfenden glared. He made a movement as though to go toward his hip. Abbott poised his left hand to strike the

hammer of his triggerless six-gun, and Wolfenden's right arm shot upward again.

"Save yore powder, Lin!" called Long Distance Budd, his voice muffled by his drooping mustache. "I'll git him next time he tries that. Take his gun, Preacher!"

Brown delightedly lifted an automatic pistol from the giant's hip pocket. The giant's eyes became filled with cunning.

"Let me get up," he growled, addressing Abbott, "and I'll take you straight to the two thousand dollars."

"Get up," said Abbott.

Still with his arms in the air, the red Goliath rose. He was so tall that his upward-reaching hands touched the scroll-shaped ornament on the bottom of the great, hanging oil lamp.

Before either Abbott or Budd could divine Wolfenden's desperate intention, he had hooked a finger into the lamp's bottom ornament and broken the hangings; the bowl crashed to the floor; there was a split second of darkness; then a smothered explosion and sheets of burning oil covered the greater part of the large room.

Abbott and his friend couldn't shoot at men who were running from fire. As a matter of fact, Abbott and his companions themselves found it necessary to get out of the way of the swiftly spreading flames. The interior woodwork was of pine, old and dry, and it caught quickly.

Outside, a crimson glare streamed from the windows. Lin Abbott ran here and there, trying to find Red Bill Wolfenden in the tangled young jungle; Wolfenden had two thousand dollars of Angela Moreland's money. When he found him, Red Bill was crouched in a copse of yellow bell and buginwillæa that had gone wild.

"Come out," Abbott called, "or I'll shoot. You're worth just as much to me dead as you are alive."

"Put that gat down," Wolfenden dared, rising, "and I'll thrash you—you coward!"

"March out to the street," ordered Abbott. "There's a little less jungle in the street, and maybe you'll have a better chance—you're going to need it."

Wolfenden was sure of his ability to whip this newcomer to Lonesome Key.

He marched eagerly, and the newcomer twice stepped on his heels.

The old building was fast becoming a raging furnace, inside and out, and the street was fairly lighted when the pair reached it. Preacher Brown and Long Distance Budd had lined up the eight other men before the burning building and were holding them there. Abbott pointed to the Moreland home and addressed Budd:

"That house there with the lighted windows—there's a sick man in that house. You and Preacher must carry him aboard the schooner, and take along the girl and the old Indian woman that you'll find with him. But first I want you to watch this fight and see that I get a square deal in it; you'll have time then to save the people in that house."

He tossed his six-gun to Preacher Brown, who caught it deftly. Then he deliberately slapped Wolfenden's bearded face hard. Red Bill went at Abbott with a roar of rage, led out with a terrific blow, and missed. Abbott placed a swift uppercut on Wolfenden's chin, and the Goliath swore voluminously. Red Bill rushed again, delivered a blow that might have broken bones had it landed squarely, and received a fast right hook on the base of the jaw.

"Go to it, Lin!" Long Distance cried muffledly. "I'm shore a-bettin' on you!"

Lin went to it. For that matter, the red giant went to it, too. The fighting became so furious that the onlookers half the time couldn't see just how it was going, though the light of the fire made the jungly street as bright as day—the moon seemed sick and scared. Once Lin Abbott backed off, found Budd with his gaze, and shouted:

"Don't forget the sick man—the people in the house with the lighted windows!"

"We won't fo'git nothin'!" Long Distance Budd shouted back in his mountaineer dialect. "Give him a buster in the nose—I want to hear it scrunch!"

While the two-man battle had been raging on and on, the fire had been spreading rapidly under a stiffening night breeze. Other houses had caught. Dead vegetation, in the streets and elsewhere, had taken fire. Then a strange thing happened, a thing so strange that even the

fighters paused in their mad determination to do damage to each other.

From somewhere high up in the smoke-filled, spark-stabbed overhead, there came distinctly a weird and unnatural voice: "God be with you, Lin Abbott!"

They stared upward aghast, the entire twelve of those men. There had been no mistake. The voice had come from high above, and it had said: "God be with you, Lin Abbott!"

CHAPTER V.

A KING OF A MAN.

THE former plantation workers looked frightenedly at one another. Each wished to see, no doubt, whether the rest had heard it. Then one of them, a chalky-faced and malarious Conch, began to gibber:

"The soul o' Thunderin' Jim is passin' now—it's the soul o' Thunderin' Jim!"

Like an echo came again that weird and unnatural voice from the smoke-filled sky. The frightened Conch gibbered in a whisper, and that whisper inaudible in the roar of the near-by flames:

"The soul o' Thunderin' Jim is passin' to——"

"Long Distance," suddenly bellowed Linderman Abbott, "the house with the lighted windows is on fire now—hurry to it!"

As a matter of fact, more than half of the dead town's houses were now burning. Live coals had fallen in the dry grass of the coral-paved street, and this, too, was beginning to blaze.

Brown and Budd drove Wolfenden's eight cutthroats ahead of them and rushed to the Moreland home.

Red Bill Wolfenden, fearing neither man nor spirit, took advantage of Abbott's slackening vigilance when he sent his men to the rescue of the Morelands and the Seminole woman. Red Bill drove a terrific left to Abbott's throat, and Abbott went down like some inanimate thing. The giant was about to leap upon his supine antagonist, when the younger man rose like a steel spring and struck Wolfenden full in the face.

"God be with you, Lin Abbott!" came from beyond the aerial whirlpool of smoke and flame.

Red Bill Wolfenden had figured in scores of fights, but never had he met an antagonist like this one—a man who simply would not be whipped. Red Bill took two more smashing blows full in the face, and then—he ran. A little way down the burning street he dived into a house that was ablaze over its entire roof; half stark mad, he might have thought to find a weapon in there, or the thing that sent him might have been merely a wild desire to hide himself from Abbott's terrible wrath. But Abbott followed him—the man had Angela Moreland's two thousand dollars.

In the musty old dining room, where cobwebs were thick and dust covered everything like gray paint long dried, the giant found himself cornered. It gave him new strength, the strength of insane desperation. He backed against a wall, there in converging shafts of red light that shone through the cobwebby windows, and whined queerly as Abbott approached him.

"Had enough?" Abbott demanded.

For answer, Red Bill bared his wolfish teeth and swore, and dived for the newcomer. The lanky figure of Long Distance Budd filled the doorway then.

"There ain't nobody in that house!" Budd cried. "But the's a girl out here a-pickin' her way through the street—it's all afire—a-lookin' fo' you, Lin—come on out!"

The fighters had centered their attention momentarily on Budd. Now Wolfenden sprang for Abbott again. Abbott sent the Goliath reeling from a blow in the chest, and at the same time shouted to his man:

"Take the girl to the schooner!"

Budd hurried out to the street just as Abbott and the giant fell to the dust-covered floor locked in each other's arms.

Angela stood wringing her hands when the tall hillman reached her. Preacher Brown and the old Seminole woman were with her.

"Where is he—Lin Abbott?" Angela asked dazedly.

Budd pointed. "In thar. I'm afear'd that house will fall in on him, but—he told me to take you to the schooner, and I'm a-goin' to do it."

Angela's own home had fallen in.

"But you must get him—you must bring him out!" she cried.

"He knows his own business," Long Distance drawled. "I can't bring him out! He told me to take you to the schooner."

"I won't go!"

"Then I'll haf to carry you." Budd smiled apologetically. "I begs yore pardon, shorely. I—— My heavens, look thar!"

The house was now completely wrapped in flames, and neither Linderman Abbott nor Red Bill Wolfenden had come out of it; they were trapped. Brown and Budd raced to it, ran around it, met in front of it.

"Seen him?" Preacher Brown panted.

"Fo' the last time," half-wept Long Distance Budd. "It ain't no use, Preacher. It's all over. See, the house is a-fallin' in now. Come on. Le's go back to the schooner. My heavens—it's awful!"

Budd turned sadly to Angela Moreland, picked her up in his arms, and turned as a man half blind toward the wharf. The girl hid her face against the lean, bronzed neck of Lin Abbott's friend and sobbed. Following them went Preacher Brown and poor old Chuckaluskee, the faithful Seminole.

A bank of black clouds had been creeping stealthily from the Gulf horizon toward the zenith. Rain began to fall almost before the little party had reached the schooner—the pouring, soaking rain of the tropics. If only it had come an hour earlier!

In the schooner's cabin, under the yellow beams of an old ship's lantern, Angela Moreland sat huddled in Lin Abbott's narrow, built-in bed and stared off at nothing in particular; her face was drawn in a sort of dull anguish, somehow like that of a child that didn't quite understand. On the floor beside the bed, Chuckaluskee squatted and also stared off at nothing in particular. Preacher Brown and Long Distance Budd sat at a small table, and either talked in whispers or were silent altogether.

Toward sunrise, the pouring rain ceased. Budd rose, opened the cabin door, and looked out toward Lonesome Key and its tragic scenes of desolation.

"The fire's all out now," he observed hopelessly. "But the rain was too late."

Yes; the rain had come too late. Budd left the door open and went back to the table, where he slumped into his chair.

A quarter of an hour later, a remarkable thing happened. Over the schooner's railing there came climbing two men—two blackened, burned, bruised, half-naked men—they were Linderman Abbott and Red Bill Wolfenden. Brown and the lanky Tennessean rushed out onto the deck. Angela stared as though she feared to believe that it was true.

"Tie this rattlesnake's hands and feet," Abbott ordered, pointing to Wolfenden.

Without question, the two men obeyed. The red Goliath did not offer an objection; he was completely, everlastingly whipped. Bound securely, he sat down on the deck without a word.

Lin Abbott then whispered to Long Distance Budd, and received a whispered answer. Another moment, and Abbott was in the schooner's little cabin and kneeling stiffly at the bedside. Awkwardly, boyishly, he took the girl's hand in his. Old Chuckaluskee rose and crept soundlessly out.

"But I thought you were burned to death!" Angela said weakly.

Abbott smiled a bruised but happy smile. "There was a cistern under the house," he explained, "and we found it. The water was up to my shoulders, and we ended the fight in there. I'm sorry they missed getting your father out. Poor old Thunderin' Jim, God love him, he was a man—a king of a man!"

"He wasn't there," said Angela, and her voice sounded small and far away. "He's been dead for weeks. Chuckaluskee and I buried him secretly, one dark and rainy night. You see, Lin, I was afraid for Red Bill and his men to know that I didn't have father to protect me; they'd have taken terrible advantage of it. I wanted to trust you when you came to me in the church last night, Lin, but—oh, I'd seen so many men that were so bad! I'm sorry now——"

"So that's why you wouldn't let anybody go into the house to see him. He wasn't in the house."

"Yes." Angela nodded. "I hope you forgive me, Lin?"

"Of course," replied Abbott. He went on: "I got a third of your three thousand dollars back. The two thousand were in that big building where the fire started, and I guess we won't ever be able to find a cent of it. But Wolfenden is good for that much money. You see, Angela, I remembered where it was that I'd seen Red Bill—I never forget a face. It was in a picture on a wall of the sheriff's office in Key West, and there's exactly two thousand dollars reward for him for murder and bank robberies!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Angela uncertainly.

"Yes," continued Linderman Abbott. "We could be married while we're in Key West collecting the reward, if you wanted to. Do you want us to do that, Angela?"

"Of course!" Angela nodded. "You've won me. You deserve me; it is the right of the brave. You say my father was a king of a man. You, too, are a king of a man! I didn't forget you any more than you forgot me, Lin, but I was afraid."

At that instant, there was a flash of gaudy color in the doorway, and a light touch on the edge of the bed.

"Yours?" asked Abbott.

"Yes." Angela Moreland smiled. "When the house caught fire, we freed him. I taught him to say the six words that were always in my heart, Lin. Listen!"

She addressed the wise-eyed newcomer: "If you don't talk, boy, you shan't have a single thing to eat!"

"God be with you, Lin Abbott!" said the parrot promptly.

On the Jump

THE purchase of two ex-army mules certainly livened up things in a certain stable. The men were used to horses, but the newcomers called for a different sort of treatment.

The boss went into the yard one morning and found a man trying to harness up a mule who obviously disliked the idea. After watching the skirmishing for some time, the boss asked:

"Does the mule ever kick you, Bill?"

"No, sir," replied Bill, keeping a wary eye on the animal; "but he often kicks where I've just been."

To the Checkered Flag-

By
John Mersereau



WORKING on a new type of motor, Jack Reese and his partner, Marcel Dejeans, were continually annoyed by Barton Kline, general manager of Corbin Motors, in which plant the two young men had formerly worked. Reese was hampered by lack of capital, but with his motor perfected, he intended to enter a car in the Girard Cup Race and hoped to win the ten-thousand-dollar prize.

Reese was in love with Rita, daughter of his former employer, Joel Corbin, and Kline hoped to win the girl himself. He had framed up a case against young Gordon Corbin, Rita's brother, in which Dolly Landon was concerned.

Reese was invited to the Corbins' home and was aghast to find that the occasion was the announcement of Rita's engagement to Kline. Dolly Landon was seated beside Reese. The Corbin manager was summoned away on urgent business and was about to kiss his fiancée good-by. Reese, enraged, started to his feet, when there was a sudden crash, and all eyes were turned in his direction.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HIS LAST HOPE GONE.

HIS close-set eyes blinking rapidly as the only indication of any repressed emotion, Barton Kline took charge of the situation brusquely. Dolly Landon had fainted. He gathered the limp form into his arms and quietly suggested to Rita that she lead the way to a bedroom.

"It's nothing to be alarmed about at all," he told the guests. "No need to call a doctor, even. Miss Landon often has these spells. A slight heart disorder, you know. But she'll be herself again in a few minutes."

The plant manager returned downstairs almost at once. He was smiling. "Just

as I thought. Miss Landon is able to sit up already. She'll be the life of the party again before supper's over." He glanced at his watch, and waved a hurried farewell. "I'm devilish sorry to have to desert this way, but I'll promise to make amends next time."

Dolly Landon, however, did not rejoin the supper party. Rita returned to the dining room alone, shortly after Kline had left, explaining that the girl had insisted on being left in the care of a maid only; she wished to rest quietly for a time, but would be down later if she felt able.

The supper proceeded lugubriously. Dolores Landon's illness had dampened the high spirits of the gathering. And Kline's absence was another cause for general discomfort. Excepting Reese, the guests were the plant manager's friends, not Rita's; and lacking his presence, a sense of constraint quickly developed. Rita did her best to be entertaining, but her somber eyes belied her smile.

By ones and twos the guests departed. There was no lingering over the demitasses; no gathering into little intimate groups to prolong an evening enjoyably spent. It was as if the atmosphere of quiet refinement about the Corbin home, Rita's superior breeding, had suddenly impressed themselves on Barton Kline's friends. At least the subdued manner of their leave-taking conveyed such an impression to Reese.

He was left alone with Rita in the otherwise deserted reception hall. For a short time they stood staring at one another in silence. Then he spoke:

"What in the name of Heaven ever made you do this mad thing, Rita?" Characteristically, Reese drove straight at the heart of the question.

"What mad thing?" the girl countered, smiling wearily.

"Engaging yourself to Barton Kline! To a man you can't possibly love, whom you can't even respect. A traitor to his employer, a blackmailer, a thief!"

Rita held up her hand in a pitiful gesture. "Jack, please don't! Please leave me. Don't ask me to explain. I can't. I won't. You can't help me in any way. And you're making it harder for me—can't you see? I must—I'm going to marry him!"

"You're not!" Reese cried fiercely. "You're not going to marry him, Rita." He grasped her hands and forced her to face him. His voice softened. "You must confide in me. You can't go it all alone, girl. You're in trouble. Kline's holding something over you; I'd be blind if I didn't see that. And I want to help you. You must tell me what it is." His voice hardened again. "Tell me, or I'll go to Kline and beat the truth out of him with my fists!"

Rita was looking up at him. Their eyes met, clashed. Suddenly the girl collapsed against him, the last remnant of her composure gone. She buried her face against his shoulder, sobbing brokenly.

"It's Gordon—my brother!" came the muffled admission. "He's in terrible trouble—threatened with disgrace. It would break my father's heart if he knew!"

"Your father knows nothing at all about Gordon's trouble? Your brother asked you to keep this from him?"

"Dad knows nothing about it. He mustn't know or suspect—ever!" the girl cried. "Gordon drove him up to San Francisco yesterday to attend some sort of a business conference. They'll be back to-morrow. Before leaving, my brother asked me to warn you about—about spending that money he lent you. He warned me against Barton Kline, too, but that was all I could get out of him.

"Then—in the afternoon—Barton called on me. He told me the facts about Gordon's—predicament. He was hor-

rible! He threatened my brother with disgrace and imprisonment unless—unless I'd marry him. He demanded that our engagement be announced at once, before dad and Gordon got back. I had to consent, don't you see?" She drew free from Reese's arms with new determination. "And I'll go through with it, too. It's the only way."

Reese accompanied her into the drawing-room, sitting down opposite her on a divan.

"I'm not so sure it's the only way," he said thoughtfully. "Kline is bluffing. I can't tell you how I happen to know, Rita, but I'm positive of it. Kline traded your brother the only evidence he had against him—the only evidence that would stand in court—for my note for ten thousand dollars——"

"He did? He admitted that?" Rita shook her head hopelessly. "But you don't know how cunning Barton Kline is. He had that—that evidence photographed before he gave it up to Gordon! He offered to take me to his home and show me the copy. And he insisted that I invite that woman—Miss Landon—as a guest to-night. He wanted to hold her over me as an additional threat, I presume, in case I weakened in going through with it."

Reese jumped to his feet. "You must let me have a talk with Miss Landon at once—if her condition permits," he said purposefully. "She's our last hope, but she can help you, I'm sure. And she wants to. She's already told me that. If I'm not very much mistaken, she's infatuated with Kline. Heaven knows why! But that's her reason."

Reese's thoughts were racing as he followed Rita up the stairway. Dolly Landon knew about the copying of the original hotel register, he theorized. She had spoken to him of a photographer in Tres Arroyos to whom she would direct him. Evidently something of value was to be gained there. She most likely had all the details of Kline's scheme at her finger tips; the plant manager would have told her to assuage her jealous suspicions. Moreover, in planning the meeting for the next day, she had appeared most sanguine. Was it too far-fetched to hope that she had some means of access to

Kline's private papers? Might she not somehow have discovered the combination to Kline's safe, where he would doubtless keep the incriminating copy?

Reese's theories came to grief here. They butted into a solid wall of fact. Kline, to all appearances, was still unaware of the loss of the motor plans from his safe at the time of his hasty departure from the Corbin home. But the "plant representative from Detroit," with whom he had gone to consult, must assuredly be the "dummy" inventor who was to take the drawings East for patenting. By now, the plant manager would have discovered the safe robbery. And finding his strong box not as impregnable as he had supposed, his first step would naturally be to remove the evidence against Gordon Corbin to a more secure repository.

Rita knocked gently on the door of the bedroom into which Dolly Landon had been taken. A second maid, stupid enough in appearance, answered the summons.

"Please ask Miss Landon if Mr. Reese may come in to see her for a moment," Rita requested.

The servant looked her surprise. "Why, don't you know, Miss Rita?" she asked. "Mr. Kline said you did. He came up by the tradesmen's entrance and carried the lady down the back stairs to his machine. He said she wanted to see a doctor at once, but didn't wish to alarm the other guests. They went a good half hour ago."

Rita and Reese went slowly down the stairs. The latter was in a brown study. His last hope had come a cropper. But he did not tell the girl that.

"Don't worry, Rita," he encouraged, as he put on his overcoat. "I won't give up on this until the last man's hung. And Miss Landon gave me a hint or two that I can follow without her help. I think I'll have something encouraging to report to you to-morrow. At the worst, I believe I know how I can convince Kline of the error of his ways."

Rita drew close. A newly awakened fear showed in her troubled eyes. "You won't do anything desperate, Jack!" she begged. "Promise me that. I won't let you sacrifice yourself——"

"I won't do anything any other man wouldn't do, who—who——" He stopped. Rita was very close to him. Her slender fingers were still clenched about his coat lapels, where she had placed them in her intense effort to wring a promise from him that would mean his safety. In her eyes was a dawning understanding of all that he had stopped short of saying. Nor did she draw away.

It was a bitter-sweet moment Reese would never forget. He knew now that Dolly Landon, with her penetrating woman's intuition, had been right. He wanted Rita Corbin—wanted her more than all the world. It was no longer enough to worship her at a distance. He wanted her love—wanted to protect her and shield her and fight for her always. But it was not fair to trade on her emotions now, her leaning on his greater strength in an emergency. And he had not the right to ask her to marry a man in his present dubious circumstances.

"I'll be careful," he resumed quietly. "You needn't worry on that score, Rita. And I'll call you up to-morrow to let you know how things are going. Or I'll drop in to see you if my news is especially good. In the meantime, cheerio! as the English say. We'll have this muddle straightened out in jig time."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LITTLE GO-GETTER.

IN the morning Reese started to follow up the single positive clew Dolly Landon had given him. From it, during the night, he had made several deductions—pieced together with what illuminating information Rita had supplied: Barton Kline had obtained a photograph of the hotel register sheet. But, reasoning from Dolly Landon's remark, it seemed probable that Kline had left the duplicating plate with the photographer who had done the work.

That was the only solution Reese could find for the chance hint of Kline's accomplice. And such a procedure would be quite in keeping with the plant manager's crafty ways. He would know that if things came to a showdown—if Joel Corbin's fighting spirit were finally enlisted to save his son's reputation—a de-

terminated effort would be made to gain possession of the incriminating evidence. So by such an obvious—and therefore unsuspected—precaution, he could keep the whip hand regardless of eventuality.

Consulting a directory, Reese found that there were two established photographers in Tres Arroyos. But he met with signal failure on his visit to the first. In answer to a direct question, he was told pointedly that a customer's commission was never discussed with unauthorized people. That taught Reese a valuable lesson. In his next attempt, he employed a subterfuge. He took a business letter from his pocket on entering the dingy premises of Carl Pfeffer, "Expert Photographer," and gave it over to the old German proprietor for inspection.

"Can you make a clear photograph of that for me?" he asked. "Or don't you handle that sort of difficult work?"

Pfeffer squinted at the sheet for an interminable time. Reese's heart dropped when it was returned to him.

"I haf in der pigsher business been for forty years," the German replied with cutting dignity. "I am an exbert photographer. I gan maker der duplicate—aber it will cost you five taler. It iss not so easy."

Reese considered dubiously. "But have you ever done any similar work? I'm in a hurry, and it's important. I can't afford to have the work bungled."

Pfeffer dropped his spectacles in his agitation over this insult to his ability. "Bungled! Carl Pfeffer iss no bungler, young mans!" Furiously he turned on his heel and ducked under the frayed curtain that divided off his "studio" from his living quarters. He flung back into the room brandishing two exposed photographic plates. "There—und there!" he cried pridefully, shoving them to Reese belligerently. "Look at them! Iss that bungling, hey?"

Reese's hands trembled as he held the second of the plates up to the light. Over its surface, he saw quickly, was stenciled a long row of names and addresses. And near the center, on two succeeding lines, he recognized the same bold chirography in which Gordon Corbin had written the agreement two days before and signed a check for ten thousand dollars.

Without asking permission, Reese stepped out onto the sidewalk. There he held the plate up to the sun as if he wished to study its merits in a better light. But out of the corner of an eye he furtively watched an approaching pedestrian.

As the man came even with him, Reese stepped forward—still with his eyes upturned to the negative. The two figures collided heavily. Reese stumbled back, half off his balance. The plate flew from his fingers and crashed down on the cement in irreparable splinters.

It was easier to mollify the German than Reese had anticipated. Fulsome praise of the ruined plate, coupled with cash payment for the new order, completely restored Carl Pfeffer's good humor.

"It iss nothing," he said. "Der customer has der one copy which he ordered. Und he told me to throw away der plate in a month if he came not back. It has alretty one week been. If he comes back, I will hoomer him by dupligating from der copy. But maybeso you should pay me for that, hey?" he suggested keenly.

Reese handed over another five dollars to salve his conscience for the deception and drove back home. He had been far more successful than he had dared to hope. He had destroyed the duplicating plate; he had discovered that Kline had only a single print from the negative. It would be difficult to obtain that, of course, but not necessarily impossible. There were ways, he reflected grimly, of breaking even the stubborn will of the plant manager.

On this point, he decided to consult with Dejeans. He was determined to go it alone in the matter, but the little Apache might have some valuable pointers to offer. It had been so in the past.

He called Dejeans from his work on the motor and took him up to the privacy of his bedroom to explain the situation. But the diminutive Frenchman listened only until he got the gist of the matter. Then, of a sudden, he was darting around the room like a madman. He rumbled his hair and wrung his hands.

"*Sacré damn!*" he moaned. "*Sacré, sacré damn!* Ees it zat I am nevaire to get even w^{iz} Corbin? Ees it zat I must

lose t'irty t'ousand dollairs?" He darted into his room, returning with a smudged envelope, which he slit open with his stiletto. With a magnificent gesture of resignation he handed one of the papers it contained to his partner.

"Ten t'ousand!" he exclaimed dramatically.

Mouth agape, Reese stared at the document in dumfounded wonder. It was the note he had signed for Gordon Corbin's loan. On the back it bore a transfer to Barton Kline.

"Twenty t'ousand more!" Dejeans laid down the second paper.

It took but a hasty glance for Reese to realize its import. With a wild cry of elation, he flung his arms around Dejeans' shoulders.

"You confounded little go-getter, you!" he kept repeating. "You confounded little go-getter! How did you ever happen to do it?"

Dejeans explained brazenly, not without pride of a sort. It appeared that he had felt urged to try conclusions with Barton Kline's safe a second time in order to recover the dangerous agreement Reese had signed. He had done this the night following Gordon's visit to Reese. In searching for the note, he had run across the copy of the hotel-register sheet. And it had struck him that this offered him an excellent means of bringing to time Gordon Corbin, who had called him a Paris gutter rat; not to mention the twenty thousand dollars Corbin had bid for it, which could be used to admirable advantage in the promotion of the Reese-Dejeans motor!

"But now—pouf!" he finished, with a sigh of resignation. "It ees for you to decide, Jacques. Zose t'irty t'ousand dollairs—zey are my gift to you!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

PERHAPS the announcement of the severance of the Corbin-Kline engagement—following the betrothal party, as it did, by a scant twenty-four hours—was news worthy of the space and speculation accorded it by society editors throughout southern California. But to the inhabitants of Tres Arroyos at large,

who depended largely on Corbin Motors for their well-being, this yielded the palm in interest to the simultaneous announcement of Barton Kline's resignation as plant manager.

To Reese, however, possessed of certain inside information which none of those concerned had seen fit to hand on to the gentlemen of the press, a third satisfying development was known—one with an additional happy significance. At last the younger Corbin had asserted the latent manhood within him, and in a positive, convincing manner.

Returning home from San Francisco with his father while Reese was explaining to Rita the fortunate turn events had taken during that morning, Gordon had broken in on them, already armed with the knowledge of his sister's engagement. He had surmised its motive and demanded explanations. Reese gave him the truth, with no mincing of words. And the boy, at last alive to the despicable part he had played, promptly took Reese to his father and made full confession to them both, sparing nothing.

It was a painful and pitiful scene to Reese, seeing Joel Corbin's pride in his only son die in a silent agony that was worse than reproach. The old land baron could have forgiven Gordon anything—anything except an admitted cowardice. There seemed no possible way of condoning that.

Then, happily or unhappily, according to the point of view of the various participants in what followed, Barton Kline arrived at that juncture to pay his respects to his betrothed. He was nattily attired in a new spring suit, and bore a florist's box of American Beauty roses—a passing inspiration—to present to the object of his dubious affections. Probably he had not as yet discovered Carl Pfeffer's first "bungle," even had he knowledge of what was missing from his safe. He appeared entirely sure of himself.

Some ten minutes later he was permitted to depart from the Corbin billiard room—where he had accompanied Reese and Gordon, not without remonstrance. He departed minus several more or less idle threats, his necktie and one wing of his collar, a few stray bits of cuticle about the face, and his position as the

Corbin plant's chief executive; not to mention his expectation of marrying Rita in good time. He retained most of his new suit, all of the American Beauty roses, and under his right eye what in fistic circles is sometimes designated as a "mouse." His sedan might have been observed driving rather rapidly from the porte-cochère.

Gordon Corbin, in almost equal disrepair, lay on the billiard table, grinning and gasping for breath, while his father patched him up with court-plaster and styptic collodion. Old Joel, sinfully pleased, disguised a reborn pride in the boy as best he could under a gruff criticism of Gordon's unpolished—if expeditious—pugilistic style.

Reese tiptoed from the room, not to disturb the freshly realized ties which bound father and son together once more. He bade a hurried good-by to Rita, deprecating her gratitude almost brusquely. He was sorrowfully aware that this further cause for intimacy between them must actually become a reason for increased restraint on his part. And despite Rita's hurt expression, he told himself as he drove away that he had done the right thing.

By helping as best he could in the emergency, he had no more than repaid Rita and her father for their many kindnesses to him. And only the success of the Reese-Dejeans motor—not through making capital of the Corbins' gratitude—could ever permit him to tell Rita what his whole being, excepting his sturdy independence, demanded of him.

Reese returned to the making of the motor with a clear conscience. He had mailed his note for ten thousand dollars back to the plant manager in a typewriter-addressed envelope. That was a moral obligation, he felt, inasmuch as Gordon had told him that Kline had reimbursed him the amount of the loan.

As for Kline's accusation that Reese had robbed his safe—delivered in the Corbin billiard room—Reese stood in no fear of recourse being taken of the law. And he had noted that there had been no accompanying mention of what valuables were stolen. That transaction, along with Gordon's blundering attempt on the same night, would reflect equally on Kline now

that there were several corroborative witnesses to the ex-plant-manager's illegal methods.

The Reese-Dejeans Special was completed in an amazingly short time—considering the character of the workmanship that went into it. Wherever possible the motor parts were hand tooled. No labor was spared to make the most insignificant and unimportant unit a thing of strength and perfection. And the inventions Reese and Dejeans had worked so long to perfect tremendously increased the efficiency of the car, an efficiency new to the automotive world.

Engineers had experimented in vain to contrive a successful nonfriction bearing; the Reese-Dejeans had that. Textbooks were unanimous in declaring it impossible to fuse copper and iron in a commercial way. The Reese-Dejeans had a copper cylinder jacket which gave radiation efficiency equaling or bettering the standard set by water-cooled systems. Running twenty-four hours steadily at high speed in an initial test in the workshop, the motor was not unduly heated.

Reese already had sent in his entry for the Girard Cup Race. This event, run, under the sanction of the A. A. A., was to be of five-hundred miles duration, and was open to any driver capable of qualifying on the Capri Track at ninety miles an hour. The Special's piston displacement was under the maximum allowed, and the gear ratio was sufficient to hurl it along at well over a hundred miles an hour—if the motor held such propelling power.

It remained only to prove that to be a fact; to prove that and to get the "feel" of the car through driving it. For racing cars have idiosyncrasies no less individual than ships; in their ranks they have likewise their "killers," their hard-luck "hoodoos," and their unresponsive steering gears. So, after limbering up the motor for several days in the workshop, Reese and Dejeans drove the car out to the deserted highway early one morning to try it out.

For miles the smooth concrete extended up the coast in an unbroken straight-away; an ideal testing ground. In the gray dawn there were none to watch and no motorists to be endangered. Reese

gradually increased the flow of gasoline. The racer, resplendent in a fresh finish of maroon paint and new tires, purred into a greater speed without a vibration to mark the change. Dejeans held a stop watch ready and kept on the lookout for the starting point of a two-mile dash, previously measured off.

"Ready!" he shrilled.

Like a thing alive, the racer picked up momentum. Under Reese's guidance it held the road perfectly, literally seeming to float along. In a minute and thirty seconds by the watch the finish marker was passed. Dejeans made a rapid computation, and shook his head disappointingly.

"Not so good," he said. "Only eighty miles an hour."

Reese laughed exultantly. "I didn't dare to let it out this first time. It may be a little stiff yet. And we have plenty of time to burn up our rubber before we go North for the race. But she'll roll with the best of 'em, Marcel. She's a traveling fool! With ordinary luck, we'll show a clean pair of heels to the field at the Capri Track. I'd stake my life on it."

The tests continued morning after morning. It was only natural that some slight defects should develop; but none of these reflected on the sterling quality of the motor. The spring suspension was modified slightly. The oiling system was improved in one or two minor details to safeguard the extreme demands of track racing. And the Reese-Dejeans Special, thus bettered, continued to course over the two-mile dash in the gray light of dawn with ever-increasing speed. Dejeans' stop watch indicated a speed of one hundred and ten miles per hour on the last of a week's trials. And still the motor held a reserve power far in excess of competitive requirements. A pace of two miles a minute, steadily maintained, would take the checkered flag from the fleetest car ever seen on a track, Reese told Dejeans.

"But we'll let it out to-morrow," he said. "I'm just kid enough to be curious to see how it feels to travel over the ground at two miles a minute or better. And it'll be our last chance before we drive up to the track."

It was Reese's desire to be on hand at

the Capri Speedway in advance of the other entrants, if possible. He wanted to gain confidence and experience on the banked mile-and-a-quarter bowl well before even the qualifying laps had to be run. That was simple prudence, even though his invaluable training as pilot of a combat plane had taught him the ultimate of speed and the last word in quick-witted maneuvering.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT THE BAR OF JUSTICE.

THAT afternoon Reese went to the Ties Arroyos Bank and withdrew the last of his capital in the form of a cashier's check. He intended to deposit it again in a San Francisco bank when he went North and draw more handily from there to defray the expense of a pit crew and race replacements.

As he left the bank, he encountered Barton Kline. He would have preferred to avoid the man, but the other was plainly waiting for him; and to have ignored the suave salutation might have been construed as arising from fear or a sense of guilt. Inasmuch as Reese felt neither, he stopped and waited for the other to come up.

"I understand you've entered a car in the Girard Cup Race, Reese," Kline began briskly, with no hint of remaining animosity because of their recent differences. "Is that true?"

"It is." Reese spoke constrainedly. "You know where you stand in my estimation, I presume, Kline. So I don't suppose you're questioning me out of idle curiosity."

"You're a very astute young man."

"Well?"

Barton Kline put another question for answer: "Are you seriously counting on finishing in the money?"

"Certainly! I'd be a fool to enter if I didn't think I had a chance of placing."

"First place?"

"Possibly."

"Would you like to bet on your chances?"

"I'm not a gambler." Reese started to turn away.

"Wait!" Kline persisted. "I'm going to offer you a proposition that you can't

refuse if you have an ounce of sporting blood in you. I'll bet you even money, any amount, that you won't place at all in the first five to cross the finish line!"

"I don't care to consider it, thanks."

"Afraid, eh?" Kline jeered, his manner undergoing an abrupt change. "Not even game to back your American Rolls-Royce on a five-to-one shot!"

Reese's face flooded with color at the taunt. His jaw bulged out. Kline's mocking smile had always irritated him and aroused his resentment. Now it infuriated him. Ever impulsive, it was impossible for his pugnacious nature to refuse a direct challenge from one whom he had good reason to regard as his most vindictive enemy. Moreover, this challenge belittled the capability of the Reese-Dejeans motor and questioned his faith in it. He stepped closer, so purposefully that Barton Kline retreated a pace.

"Listen, Kline!" he said tensely. "I know you've got something up your sleeve. You must have. You've never seen my car perform, to my knowledge; you don't know what it's capable of. And you're the kind that wouldn't play penny ante without a marked deck. But I don't give a cuss!

"Here's a proposition for *your* sporting blood," he plunged on recklessly. "Gordon Corbin has told me that he has transferred to you the note for the ten thousand dollars I borrowed of him. I have that money in the bank ready to pay you on demand. I'm ready to settle now. But if you want to sign an agreement giving me until one week after the race to meet the note, I'll wager you the ten thousand, even money, that I *do* place in the first five. If I win, you give me the note to destroy. If I lose, you get the Reese-Dejeans bearing. Probably I won't have a cent in the world to pay you otherwise. That's how far I'm game to back my motor."

"Done!" Kline agreed.

Before posting the bet with a stakeholder, however, Reese telephoned Dejeans to get his consent to the gamble. But as he had anticipated, the little Frenchman was eager to share the risk.

"*Sacré damn*, yes!" Dejeans cried. "It ees ze suckair money. And, *voilà!* Ze

patents are in your name. Put zem all up if zis feesh would t'row away ze money!"

Reese, however, was too prudent for that. The small voice of reason was already telling him that he was playing another man's game in accepting the bet at all. Kline, he knew, was no gambler by nature; he played only pat hands. Hence there must be something behind this "sporting proposition," eminently fair and aboveboard though it was to all outward appearance.

It was too late, however, to back out; the agreement was made. And Reese knew that he would never have reneged, after going so far, even were he gambling against a more gracious opponent than Barton Kline. So the money was put up. And Reese returned home with the disquieting memory of Kline's parting smile—mocking, as ever, and triumphant—to keep him awake and restless during the long hours of the night.

At four o'clock—an hour before dawn—the alarm clock startled him bolt upright in his bed. With a sheepish grin for his unusual case of "nerves," he shut off the bell and began to dress. On the cot against the opposite wall of the workshop Dejeans was already sleepily rolling a cigarette. Together now they shared the night watch over the completed racer. And this was their customary hour of arising during the testing of the motor; it insured them the safety of a deserted highway on which to make their trials.

Dejeans touched a match to his cigarette and inhaled deeply. "Me," he said yawning, "I am glad zis ees ze last time we must get up so early. Zose clock makes me seeck like ze army reveille!"

But no sleepiness could long endure under the exhilarating spell that came with the sweeping motion of the racer well under way. The air had a bite and healthy tang to it, beating on the faces of the partners crouched down behind the cowl. Dawn was just breaking as they reached the highway. The landward horizon was a soft pastel of crimson and amethyst. And the concrete roadway lay into the distance, gray, deserted, and perfectly smooth, straight as an arrow.

"Get ready!" Dejeans warned, as he caught sight of the signboard, well ahead,

that was the first marker for the sprint. In a second, it seemed, they were abreast of it.

"Go!"

From a running start at comparatively low speed—a mile a minute—the racer accelerated marvelously. With a drumming roar, with flames shooting from the side ports, it skimmed the highway like a streak of crimson light. Faster, and still faster; hillside, trees, electrical poles—all merged into a fantastic blur. The wind, screaming, was shunted aside.

Reese threw out the clutch and let the racer coast on to an easy stop.

"How long?" he asked. Dejeans peered down at the stop watch. He looked again. "Fifty-seven seconds," he answered in an awed whisper. "Bettair zan two miles a minute!"

"Some!" Reese grinned elatedly. "And she wasn't all the way out at that."

He threw the gears into reverse and started to turn. But before he could get well under way, a motor cyclist turned into the highway from a side road, intercepting them. The rider held up his hand for them to stop. A star showed on his leather jacket. He spoke in a taciturn growl, handing over a slip of paper already made out.

"Pinched for speedin'. And don't ramble over thirty goin' back to town. I'll be following you the whole way."

Reese started to remonstrate, but was cut short.

"Tell it to the judge, brother, at ten o'clock. I'm too sleepy to understand."

A mile farther along a second motor cyclist joined the first. They compared stop watches as they rode along abreast the racer. Something like admiration showed for an instant on the taciturn one's face.

"It's a wonder this concrete didn't roll up and follow you at a hundred and thirty per," he called to Reese. "But Lord help you when the judge gets hold of you; no one else can!"

And Reese found that he stood in need of aid when his case was called to the bar of justice. Old Judge Ennis was a self-constituted terror to speeders, known for his harsh sentences throughout southern California; moreover, he was a notorious "bawler out" of his victims.

"Reese," he said in pronouncing sentence, "you have pleaded guilty to driving in excess of two miles a minute over a public highway. I have been informed by a prominent citizen who reported your flagrant case that this is a customary practice of yours. If so, you are an idiot—more dangerous to the Commonwealth than a maniac! I should like to sentence you like a common felon. Unfortunately, I cannot; you have injured no one."

After this somewhat ambiguous statement, his honor pronounced the judgment of the court: "Fifteen days in jail or complete suspension of your driving privilege for six months!"

"But I must drive in the Girard Cup Race two weeks from now!" Reese protested.

"You should have thought of that before," Judge Ennis replied acidly. "The penalties of the law aren't prescribed for the comfort of violators. The sentence stands. Choose your alternative."

Dejeans sprang from his seat far back in the courtroom. "*Sacré damn!*" he cried. "It ees zat you do not onderstand—"

"Order!" barked the judge.

But Dejeans, beside himself with anxiety and excitement, continued to pour forth a torrent of words, when he was again ordered to silence.

Judge Ennis nodded to the bailiff and pointed his trembling gavel at the irate Frenchman. "Ten days for contempt!" he thundered. "No alternative!"

Again, it appeared, the calculating brain of Barton Kline had scored disastrously against the partners. For there was no doubt in the mind of either of them as to the identity of the "prominent citizen" who had informed Judge Ennis of their early-morning tests.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WITH HOPE RENEWED.

REESE accepted his misfortune with the best grace he could muster. There was no denying the seriousness of the predicament he was in, however. And Dejeans' temporary incarceration made the situation even more desperate. Naturally Reese had instantly decided to choose the penalty of losing all driving

privilege for six months as the lesser evil of the alternatives offered him. And in the same moment he had decided that Dejeans should drive the Special in the Girard Race in his stead. But the impulsive Frenchman had made that impossible the next second by foolishly contesting the decision of Judge Ennis.

As matters stood, therefore, the Reese-Dejeans would have to be piloted by some other if it were to compete in the race only a little over a fortnight distant. Dejeans would be out of jail before that time and could still ride as mechanician; but it would be tempting Providence for him to drive after having only three or four days in which to familiarize himself with the Capri Track. In addition, Reese understood that the qualifying lap would have to be run several days in advance of the race.

Reese left the courtroom, after a hurried farewell to the disconsolate Marcel, with a tentative plan of action already made. He hired a trustworthy watchman to stand guard over the racer during his absence and caught a noon auto stage for Los Angeles. There, he telephoned an official of the Beverly Hills Speedway with whom he was slightly acquainted. Luck was with him. The other was able to put him immediately in touch with an unengaged racing driver of ability and experience—one, however, who had won no spectacular success.

"Muldoon is a good, heady pilot," the official said, "and his record is A 1. He's a square shooter. But he's never had a really first-class car under him. He's been a whipper-in with the Lansing team until this season. But he quit them in a huff when they wouldn't give him a decent boat. Look him up, anyhow. He may be just the man you want."

Reese found that the Los Angeles address given him by the other was that of a garage; and he found big Jimmy Muldoon working there for mechanic's wages. The black-haired Irishman, muscled like a bull, crawled out of an overhauling pit in response to Reese's question. But his ready smile left him when Reese explained the nature of his business.

"No, sir! I'm through with the racin' game," Muldoon said positively. "I've been the goat for years on every track

from Sheepshead Bay to Cotati, and I'm through shovin' hacks acrost the finish after the stands are empty. I never won a race. I never had a chance to. And if I ever go back, I'm goin' to be sure I've got a heap beneath me that won't hit even the high spots. Jimmy Muldoon's through and finished as an also-ran. So there you are! Did you ever hear of any special winnin' from a classy field like the one that will turn out for the Girard Race?"

"I suppose you're familiar with the plan of the Capri Track, aren't you?" Reese countered.

"I am," replied Muldoon, "and I'm here to tell you, friend, that it's the best laid out for its size in the world, bar none. The Girard is goin' to see some records fall."

"Could you do a hundred and thirty on the straightaways?" Reese asked tentatively.

"Can a darky shoot craps! I'll say I could—if there's a car that could stand the grind."

"I'd pilot my car myself," Reese said, "only I was arrested for speeding this morning, and my driving privilege was suspended for six months——"

"Sorry," Muldoon interrupted, "but I——"

"I was doing a hundred and thirty an hour on the highway," Reese let drop casually, "and wasn't wide open at that."

"A hundred and th——" Muldoon stared incredulously. "On the level? Or are you kidding me?"

"On the level. You'll find it on record in Judge Ennis' court. I don't know how you feel about it, but the old boy seemed to think that was going some!"

Big Jimmy Muldoon glanced at the clock hooked onto a spike in the wall. It was on the stroke of five.

"Oh, well!" he sighed, unhooking his overalls. "This makes the third job I've quit this month. I just can't seem to be satisfied. But what's the diff? Some fools are made, and some are born racing drivers. That's me all over, Mabel. I'm hired!"

The eager Irishman returned to Tres Arroyos with Reese that night. Reese had become entirely convinced of the other's honesty, aside from the recom-

mendations and spotless record he had. Furthermore, Muldoon knew the financial ins and outs of the racing game thoroughly. And as his pay, aside from expenses, was to be half of whatever prize money he made, he quickly discovered several sources which might be made to yield an additional profit.

He promised to get bonus contracts from every company that had equipment on the Reese-Dejeans—from spark plugs and tires to gasoline and oil. A win would mean several thousand dollars from those sources for advertising privileges, he said. Then there was the lap money—twenty-five dollars for each lap a driver led the field—another ten thousand to shoot at.

Reese saw that if victory fell to the Reese-Dejeans, even with the profit divided, he would have ample funds to build the first demonstration car. And the wager with Kline would net enough to establish a showroom in Los Angeles or San Francisco where the machine could be exhibited to possible investors. On paper it all looked as good as his. The Reese-Dejeans could ramble with the best of them; and Muldoon, an able man, was out to make a name for himself.

Reese, however, was beginning to realize the tremendous mistake he had made in gambling with Barton Kline. Practically, by so doing, he had put a premium on Kline's sinister schemings. And the arrest that morning was only the first of the crippling attempts that might be expected before the race. The Geneva Corporation's field man would bend every effort toward keeping the Reese-Dejeans from making a favorable showing. But it was impossible to forecast from what direction the next blow would fall, so Reese had to be content with putting Muldoon on his guard.

The big Irishman refused to become alarmed. "These racing crews are the best bunch of clean sports in the world," he said. "It's a religion with them, almost, to play the game square. I'll hand-pick my pit team; there'll be no dirty work from the inside; mark that. And nobody I don't know ain't right'll get within shootin' distance of this Darby of ours. All I ask is fair racin' luck, and we'll show the cockeyed world!"

Reese devoutly hoped that such would be the case; but it was with a vague presentiment of hovering disaster that he watched Muldoon start the racer on the long drive up to the Capri Track early the following morning. At the last moment, he had decided not to go along. The Special was in perfect shape. Muldoon was trustworthy and competent. And the Irishman, with his big chance at last accorded him, had enough at stake to assure his utmost vigilance in safeguarding the machine from harm.

Considering all that, Reese felt that he could employ the time before the race to better advantage than in loafing about the speedway. Too, when near the slender, low-hung racer, there was the constant hungering urge to ignore Judge Ennis' harsh sentence—to sit behind the motor he had perfected and drive faster and still faster to the siren spell of its powerful, pulsing rhythm.

That, however, was out of the question. For six months even the services of the rattletrap flivver must be dispensed with. Judge Ennis had indeed chosen a heartbreaking means of impressing the legal limits of speed on one unhappy violator. And had that "prominent citizen," Barton Kline, chanced to pass Mother McGuire's driveway at the moment the maroon speedster glided from it, he might have found a perverted satisfaction in viewing the dejected watcher who stood staring after it, anxious and brooding, like one whose eyes and heart follow a ship going hull down on the horizon.

As a matter of plain truth, there was another reason to prohibit Reese's going to the Capri Track at this time. He was short of money. By remaining at Mother McGuire's, he could live half as cheaply as at some San Francisco hotel. And the saving of forty or fifty dollars was of prime necessity now. Muldoon's living expenses for two weeks would entirely consume the slender surplus that had been set aside for emergency use. Even as it was, Reese feared that he would have to dispose of some of his cherished personal effects to make the trip a day or two before the race.

He was spared this sacrifice, however, through Rita's kindness. Making a call

on her late in the week, she invited him to motor up with the Corbins and share their reservations in the grand stand. Her father and Gordon added their insistence, so Reese finally capitulated.

He had intended to become one of the pit team for the Reese-Dejeans, but a little thought showed him the foolishness of this. The pit crew was limited to five men by track regulations, and he saw the advantage of leaving this work to men specially skilled in it. Where seconds counted, it was better to make his personal desires subservient to greater efficiency.

Big Jimmy Muldoon wrote that his service crew was the most expert on the speedway and absolutely to be trusted. And his daily reports to Reese, telegraphed the last week, glowed with optimism and faith in the Special. He had qualified at ninety-six miles an hour, but under wraps, so he said, to keep other pilots from getting a line on his speed. Remaining a dark horse until the last moment had many advantages. The motor was behaving perfectly, too; the car handled splendidly; and with Dejeans now on hand to manage the final tuning-up, it was "a lead-pipe cinch we can't land worse than second or third."

Such was the last heartening message Reese received before leaving Tres Arroyos with the Corbins the day before the race.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MAD RUSH FOR VICTORY.

THE whole world, it seemed, was headed for the Capri Track on the glorious spring day that was to make or mar the fortunes of the partners. Driving down the peninsula from San Francisco, where they had spent the night at the Palace Hotel, the Corbin party found the highway choked with a solid stream of southbound machines. The Girard Cup Race, while not offering as great a purse as some, was the recognized classic of the California racing season. And in the eyes of all motordom a victory here was as signal an achievement as winning the checkered flag in the great Indianapolis annual.

Reese threw aside all anxiety and gave himself up to the pleasure of Rita's com-

pany. Dejeans had telephoned from the track early that morning, reporting all well with the Special; and the little Frenchman was enthusiastic over Muldoon's rare driving ability. So victory or defeat rested on the knees of the gods; worry could change the result not one iota; and this day with Rita—the last one ever, Reese had decided, if Muldoon and the Reese-Dejeans failed irretrievably—must be made to yield all happiness.

Owing to the unexampled turnout of motorists to attend the opening of the Capri Track, with consequent trouble in parking, the Corbin party did not reach their box until the last moment. They had barely time to settle themselves and look over the various entrants in the race before the last signal bomb exploded. Broadside to them, in perfect rank and file, glistened the flamboyant colors of twenty-odd roaring, unmuffled racing monsters. White and red, yellow, black, or checkered, with drivers and mechanics laughing, stern, or indifferent, they waited motionless but vibrant, ready for the grueling contest that would mean injury or death or bitter disappointment to the many who rode; victory and the rewards of victory to the chosen few.

Reese touched Rita's arm lightly. "It's a great sight, isn't it?"

She nodded. "Which is yours?"

"No. 12," he answered softly, pride catching at his throat. "That's our car, Rita—the maroon one—next to the outer rail."

Below them they saw the shining, low-hung Special, with Big Jimmy Muldoon, hooded and goggled, lounging over the wheel. Beside the pilot fidgeted the gnomelike, diminutive form, dwarfed by comparison, that must be Marcel Dejeans.

"It's beautiful, Jack—perfect!" the girl said earnestly. "And you'll win, I know, because—well, because you deserve to. You've always played fair; you've fought your way to this against tremendous odds." An almost imperceptible shudder passed over her tense body. "But it seems terrible that men must risk their lives just—just to provide a spectacle like this."

"You're wrong there, Rita," Reese replied quietly. "It's endurance contests such as this that have perfected the motor car. It's the acid test. The fit survive, as in everything, and the weak fall by the wayside. To-day will decide, for instance, just how good the Reese-Dejeans bearing is. It will decide whether our air-cooled motor—the first ever entered in such an event—can stand comparison from every angle with the water-cooled type. If we win, we've written a new page in automobile history. If we go bust, so to speak—well, somebody may write a funny poem and immortalize us like Darius Green and his flying machine!"

Rita's laughing answer was cut short by the starting of the pace lap. In squads of four, like a well-drilled platoon, the racers rolled into motion behind the pace car, once around the elliptical bowl. Then the pace car, well in advance, darted off the track. On the bridge, the starter's flag poised, fell. A tumultuous, eager cheer welled up from the stands. With a thundering roar, the first rank of four lunged across the starting line; the second, third, and fourth followed off to a perfect start. In a dizzying riot of color and sound, the Girard Cup Race was under way!

Reese, of course, had eyes only for the maroon Special, for No. 12, with Big Jimmy Muldoon already striving for an advantage before the first turn was reached. A flame-red Mercedes was leading. The remaining three of the first rank were still neck and neck—a Sunbeam, a black Italian car, and a Peugeot. The second rank was beginning to string out. The third was closing in on the heels of it. And the Reese-Dejeans, hurtling forward like an unleashed greyhound, was already nosing past these along the outer rail.

Jimmy Muldoon, the pilot who had never won, who had never until now had his chance, was at last making his long-delayed bid for fame. At the second turn, he had headed all but the leading four. On the straightaway, fronting the grand stand, he glided by the Italian, the famous Torrano, amid wild acclaim.

It was grim and reckless driving, with death an ever-present menace. Inches

and split seconds, sometimes, and the most artful control, changed foolhardy risks into consummate skill, earning the breathless applause of the spectators.

And the Reese-Dejeans was rolling on. Pistons beating, thundering along, it rocketed onward in stubborn pursuit of the three leaders. Close in back swept Torrano, the mad Italian, who had won last year's Grand Prix. Behind him strung the field, with many of the world's best pilots still far from beaten.

Reese, gripping the edges of his seat, watched enthralled. He saw the Sunbeam fall back into third place behind the Peugeot. He saw the Peugeot head the flame-red Mercedes on the far turn. And he saw the Reese-Dejeans pass the Sunbeam, closely trailed by the black Italian car.

Positions were changing rapidly on the scoreboard. The first lap went to the Mercedes; the second to the Peugeot. Jimmy Muldoon took the third. And the fourth and the fifth! Only the scoreboard could tell positions now; places had lost meaning in simply following the flashing, pounding streaks that circled endlessly past the stands. But the Reese-Dejeans and Muldoon, dark horses both, were beginning to draw the amazed attention of the concourse. An air-cooled motor, an obscure pilot, a freak special, and a maniac Irishman! It was little less than effrontery for them to lead the van of the world's best cars. Yet the sympathies of the spectators went out to the unknowns. They were cheered to an echo on every record-smashing circuit of the ten successive laps they led.

Torrano, however, was creeping up. With shining eyes, Reese watched Muldoon hold the lead over the Italian by the sheerest skill and daring. A wearing duel developed for supremacy. The Reese-Dejeans never faltered. Neither did the black Italian car. Speed and more speed! Faster and still faster! The eyes blurred in following the dizzying sweep of the speed-hungry monsters.

Then the big Irishman began to take fewer chances. He had tried out his car at its best and found it not wanting. He was content to settle down shortly to a pace of one hundred and twenty miles an hour and let the law of averages get

in its deadly work. After all, while not exactly comparable to the hare and tortoise, it is a steadily maintained speed that wins endurance contests, not brilliant, sporadic flashes.

Torrano, on the other hand, continued to accept risks that left the crowd momentarily dumb. And he got away with them, miraculously, for a time. On the thirteenth lap he wrested the lead from Muldoon and held it continuously for ten miles. But the Irishman dogged his heels, and went to first place again after that distance.

The race settled down to the grueling contest of endurance—man and machinery—it actually was. Cars began to drop out here and there. A Spanish car limped from the track. One of Muldoon's old teammates on the Lansing crew quit with carburetor trouble. The Peugeot threw a tire on a turn and narrowly escaped wrecking the machines bunched behind it.

At the end of one hundred laps the scoreboard showed that the flame-red Mercedes had taken five, the Peugeot one, and the Sunbeam four. Torrano, the popular favorite to win, and Muldoon had nearly equally divided the remaining ninety. And the Reese-Dejeans was running first once more after dropping a close lead to the Italian for several laps because of a rear-tire blowout. It had not been to the pits once because of engine trouble.

Reese turned proudly to Joel Corbin. "Well, what do you think of the Reese-Dejeans now?" he asked, laughing. "Do you still maintain that it hasn't a chance to wedge out a place in the automobile industry?"

The old manufacturing magnate lowered his field glass and rubbed his tired eyes. "You've almost convinced me, my boy!" He smiled. "And if that wild Irishman of yours doesn't break his neck before the finish, I'm sold on the merits of your car, by Godfrey! If the Reese-Dejeans finishes at better than a hundred an hour—let alone placing in the prize money—I'll see that you get backing of the right sort, if I have to go out and beg it. Your patents for air-cooling alone, if successful, will be worth——"

He was cut short by a scream from

Rita. The surrounding stands seemed to be rising in a living mass. Reese's heart seemed to stop beating as he looked from his superior height over the heads of intervening watchers. No. 12, the maroon Reese-Dejeans Special, out of control, was careening across the track at the turn. Torrano, tailing tight behind, swerved instantly, and with a consummate bit of driving steadied his machine and raced on—unquestionably supreme now—with undiminished speed.

No. 12 crashed drunkenly off the track, rolled over, with Muldoon and Dejeans crumpled in the wreckage beneath.

By showing his credentials, Reese was admitted to the field hospital. But even before he had plowed a way through the crowd, he had heard the sickening news: The driver of No. 12 was dead—killed instantly. The little French mechanic, miraculously—possibly because of his small size—had escaped with only a broken arm and possibly some internal injuries.

After Reese had seen Dejeans, cursing and weeping alternately—an augury for rapid recovery—comfortably ensconced in a hospital room with the broken arm set, he returned to the Capri Track. The Girard Cup Race was long over. Torrano, the mad Italian, had been victorious, winning the ten-thousand-dollar prize and other thousands of lap money. Three spectators had been injured by a thrown tire late in the race. All established records for the distance had fallen. Muldoon was dead. And No. 12 was a hopeless wreck, good for little else than junk.

Reese poked about the ruins of the Special, a twisted mass of metal and wood, upside down. Suddenly he bent forward alertly. His face went hard and set. Dejeans had told him that the accident had been caused by a broken radius rod; he had come to verify this for a fact. A portion of the rod was missing, twisted off. The other part remained. Half across the face it showed a raw fracture—such as might be expected from crystallization. But the other half of the diameter was gummed over with a greasy substance. Scraping this away, Reese saw the clean cut of a hack-saw blade.

Big Jimmy Muldoon had not lost his "big chance" and his life because of the Special's weakness, then. Reese was not to lose success because the Reese-Dejeans motor was a failure. Somehow Muldoon had relaxed his vigilance or trusted some one unworthy of his faith; and Dejeans had missed the abrasion because of the clever filling-in that hid it. The radius rod had been weakened deliberately, in cold blood, to bring ruin to the partners.

And Reese, standing with clenched fists and blazing eyes over the wreckage

—the wreckage of his fondest dreams, too—could think of only one who could profit from this ruin. And that one was Barton Kline, with his mocking smile, who had wagered ten thousand dollars so confidently, practically against the invaluable bearing patent, that the Reese-Dejeans Special would not even place in the first five to finish.

The succeeding chapters of this novel will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out November 15th. It began in the September 15th issue. Back numbers may be obtained from news dealers or the publishers.



THE HILLS ARE CALLING

By Everett Earle Stanard

WHEN you want solace from sorrowful hours,
 Quit you the valleys and vales,
 March to the highlands where blow the rare flowers,
 Where the trees bend to the gales.
 Down in the level lands waters croon low;
 Get you away from the mystical flow;
 Hit the hill trail, brother; rise up and go.
 Breathe a new air. Get in tune!

When you want rest from the struggle and strife,
 Din of the loud city streets,
 Clatter and clash and shrill business of life,
 Traffic that pulses and beats—
 Lift up your eyes to the hills that invite;
 Tramp it and find in the tramping delight;
 Rough it a while—say a day and a night—
 Sleep 'neath the pines and the moon!

When you grow weary of long summer days,
 Brother, it's time to be gone.
 Get a new vision and travel new ways;
 It's the wrong road you are on.
 Mountains will soothe you with lullaby song.
 Mountains will heal you and make your heart strong;
 Cleanse you and send you home singing along.
 Seek you the hills. Get in tune!



When Cowboys Clash~

By
W.D. Hoffman~

(A NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

FOR THE HONOR OF THEIR STATES.

BIG DAL bent his long legs at a comfortable angle against the lunch counter, dismissed from his thoughts the scene at Loco Lobo on the departure of the cattle train one week previously, and in an instant was risking a shy look at the young woman behind the counter. She was almost the first girl he had glimpsed since arrival—certainly the prettiest.

Gradually the Texan's big brown eyes contracted into deceptive disregard as she saw him. He studied the cook's smoking steaks, calendars on the wall, cash register, and cigar case. But his eyes returned again and again, until wistfully he gazed on the vision waiting on the motor-cycle policeman two places down. And Dal pronounced his quest at an end.

Creamy skin, with the flush of mesa dawns in the cheeks, he saw, beneath a fluff of raven hair; the blaze of Pecos sunsets in the full saucy lips around which trailed a smile; large blue-black eyes that shone tender as a Texas fawn's; nose curved upward at the tip; nostrils tiny and pink and ready to quiver, like a thoroughbred's; throat flawless, white as snow on the winter range. Oh, cowboy!

Dal knew horses from bronchos to thoroughbreds, and in his mind's eye he pictured handsome "Oklahoma" Bates

twirling his rope for this filly. The strapping big cow-puncher turned uneasily on his stool and scanned the doorway, for Oklahoma had left the stock pens at his heels, and would very likely find his way into the Little K. C. restaurant also. Dal gazed again worshipfully after the girl, and his thoughts leaped back to Loco Lobo in the Panhandle, and that strange compact his companions had inveigled him into.

Sunset it was, mesa range, blood-red in the west; black stock pens, clouds of dust where cattle stirred and bawled; a brown streak where railroad cars stood on the siding. Stetsoned figures in the foreground, drab and dusty—all but two. These two perched like birds of paradise on the stock-pen fence.

"I'm bettin' on 'Shorty.'" "Pop" Lithgow grinned. "Not that he's the handsomest, but girls is partial to pink. Now, Oklyhoma, he's tall an' thin, an the women like 'em that a way, but purple—nix on it!" Pop's brows drew down ponderously as he scanned the gaudy-shirted youth. "B'sides, I allus bet on Texas."

"Texas luck—a sure thing!" grunted Big Dal. "I dunno. Oklyhoma's a handsome cuss, as you opine, and them two waddies will run nip and tuck. Depends on the women, not them. The question ain't which one of these waddies will rope a filly first, but which one will be seen first by a filly—which one steps from the train first, so's the girls c'n get a look."

"Not me!" Shorty grinned. "I'm a married man; never told you boys that down in Abilene I got a wife."

"You marriest—an' goin' to the city with them togs!" Pop Lithgow scowled. "Bust me, Dal, you got to uphold the honor of Texas, then, yo'r own self!"

Oklahoma Bates, from his perch on the fence, showed even white teeth and a sun-cured smile. "What you waddies bet Oklyhoma cain't hackamore a filly quick as Texas?"

"Meanin' which?" demanded Pop.

"You-all pick yo'r Romeo. The State of Oklyhoma's got a hundred dollars, American money, says we c'n bring a bride back to Loco Lobo quicker'n Texas."

A slow grin broke on Pop Lithgow's wrinkled face. "Oklyhoma says—d'ya hear it, cowboys?—Oklyhoma opines he's got a hundred to stake agin' Texas luck—agin' Dal Canby here that he c'n brand a filly an' bring her into Loco Lobo bridle-broke quicker'n Dal Canby—"

"Not me!" protested the big cow-puncher.

"Yeah, you!" snapped Pop. "Whad-dya mean—declinin' to take his bet? There ain't a waddie here'll take no fer an answer. You sawed-off, wall-eyed, fuzz-tail son of a wind-suckin' Romeo, sence when yuh hole up out o' sight when anybody laid a bet agin' Texas?"

"I ain't holin' up."

"Shore yuh ain't, Dal! D'ya hear it, waddies? He's put in his ante. I raise yuh a hundred, Oklyhoma. Dal, how much you got in this here pot?"

"Who, me? I ain't in any pot!"

"Yuh ain't in a pot! Jumpin' mavericks! If yuh don't call this Oklyhoman, arrived here recent, I'll go my own self, an' bring down a widder!"

"Put it in writin', then." Big Dal grinned.

"Who's got a pencil?" Pop reached out his bony fingers and seized a stub of lead, drew out an old envelope and scribbled painfully, while onlookers slid from the fence and peered over his shoulder. This is what they saw:

Oklahoma puts in a hundred, Big Dal Canby puts in a hundred that says each kin brand a maid in the city and bring the bride to Loco Lobo first after date, follering de-

livery of said cattle. Said stakes to be invested in Texas school land at six cents an acre, and all other bets to be side bets—

"What's that?" demanded Big Dal suddenly. "Texas school land? Who wants Texas school lands?"

"That's yo'r chief asset, both of yuh!" snapped Pop. "Fust thing th' contemplated bride'll ast will be how big's yo'r ranch down in Texas, won't she? Well, you waddies havin' no more land'n a buzzard, this will give each of yuh a nose-hold afore yuh start."

"That's what I calls wisdom," drawled Oklahoma Bates. "That means I wins three thousand acres with the bride."

"Yuh mean, it means Texas takes the three thousand with the bride," put in Big Dal.

"Go on, you waddies, and git them beef to movin'," grunted Pop Lithgow. "We'll lay our side bets after yuh leave!"

Oklahoma chuckled as they started for the cars. "Watch that eatin' house near the stockyards. There was a fluff in there a year ago when I was there for the Box H." He flashed the Texan a meaningful, sure-thing look.

Big Dal grinned in memory of the scene, and abruptly there stood facing him the vision that had affected him so strangely after two solid years on the range.

"'Lo, Texas—just get in? Butter—butter? Quarter pound of butter, to start? What's eating you?"

"I'm eatin' it—yes, ma'am! Qua'ter poound, to sta't. Yuh see—"

She was gone, to the ice chest.

"Yuh see," he said as she returned, "we don't have it daown on the range." His soft voice drawled out musically. "Not countin' we have all the caows in the world." His voice trailed off as she laughed lightly and hurried toward the motor-cycle officer.

Dal Canby leaned his shoulders forward, raised the large-thewed arms that made him premier steer roper of the Panhandle, and peeled the butter down. Flake by flake he raised it behind pearly teeth, with the exquisite enjoyment of one long denied. Dal would travel miles to get good butter—and this was good.

"Say, Juliette!" She was in front of him, eyes and lips merry at the disap-

pearing butter flakes. "And now you c'n tote along some poached aiggs on toast, coupla shredded wheats, stew and veg'tables, and coffee. And, lemme see, ham and aiggs. It ain't every day——"

"Two on a raft—couple straw pillows—cow in the garden—two feathers and a slice of grunt—bucket of mud to come along!"

"That ain't exactly——" He checked himself at her laugh.

"Leave it to me, Rome-o!" She was back with the white-capped cook. "Speed 'em up for that range dude!"

He heard her undertone, suspected it was not intended to be wholly an undertone. It shocked him. "Range dude!" She didn't like his cowboy togs, then. Well, he'd put on store clothes, if she said the word. Oh, cowboy!

"Range dude!" That remark was sticking in his craw. He'd show her. He was silent, when she came with the order. Twinkling brown eyes tried to be soberly serious, bent down on the plate under the high-peaked Stetson.

"More butter, Rome-o! Got another pound extry in the cooler."

Dolefully he answered: "I'm hankerin' for it, ma'am. And, say, Juliette, you work in this rest'rant reg'lar? Yuh see it's a tolerable ways off from my bo'rdin' haouse, and I ain't got my hoss——"

"Come afoot, if those little boots don't pinch your toes, so's you can stand it, Texas! This is where I work, morning, noon, and sundown. Bring your friends, and I'll order an extry keg of butt-er!" She was gone again, to the motor-cycle officer. Dal heard him call her Maggie!

He heard low words and laughter that would have been sweet but for the fear that smote him that he might be the butt of her joke. He got grins and knowing looks from the man in khaki, with tight-fitting vest and coat, and shining puttees.

Dal consumed the meal in silence, and the natural twinkle went as far afield of his brown eyes as it was possible for it to go. That ice-cream dessert—he was waiting! Who was that motor-bike cop, anyway? The other girl, the scrawny blonde, had started to wait on that fellow, and now the brunette was talking to him.

Dal's large head moved uneasily around, to the ceiling, the faded prints on the wall, to the window hole to the kitchen. Holy cactus! How were customers to be served with motor-bike cops in uniform sparkin' the waitresses at the busy hour?

"Scuse me, Texas! You was wantin' a——"

"Ice cream—make it several!"

She brought it, in two installments. Dal tried to scowl darkly, until he looked up at her. His sun-baked lips curved upward, revealing even, iridescent teeth.

"Yo'r name—is Maggie?"

"Why spoil it? Let it ride Julie!"

"You was never on a ranch, Maggie-Julie?" he asked, smiling.

"You said it! And I never won't be. Gosh, you range boys step rapid!"

"That answer final? You don't like my range togs, that it, Julie, girl?"

She gave him a light, half embarrassed look as she scribbled his check and withdrew almost too hastily. Dal chuckled; got her guessing without being too much on the prod, he concluded.

On the way out, eyes down to his boots, the Texan crashed head-on into handsome, dark-eyed Oklahoma.

"Haow?" Dal grinned.

The slim puncher's thin lips curled into a sarcastic smile. "See yuh unlimberin' yo'r rope pronto, on that first filly, all set to cut her out and toss on yo'r hackamore——"

"What filly?"

"Th' black-haired one, passin' up the big blonde. Yuh got a good eye, settin' where yuh did, talkin' and——"

"You watchin'—through the winder?" Big Dal grinned, eyes narrowing slightly.

"Now you watch Oklyhoma!"

"Thanks! I got to be goin' back to see Lambert."

CHAPTER II.

MIGHT MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

HAMBERT was the agent of the O Bar Dot; Dal reported the safe arrival and delivery of fifteen hundred head of prime steers, filled out some papers, and concluded the actual business of his trip, so far as the O Bar Dot was concerned. The young woman who stamped his re-

port with her notary seal—henna-haired, bobbed, blue-eyed—asked numerous questions about his plans, about the ranch, how long he was going to stay in the city.

"It must be wonderful to live on a ranch!" She sighed. "And be a cow girl!" She studied the big Texan with eyes that revealed her romantic soul.

Big Dal hurried away. "Funny she likes the ranch and Julie don't!" he reflected. "Now, if I was sot on winnin' that bet, I mought coax huh!"

When the Texan went back to the Little K. C. at noon the raven-haired one let him sit quite a while waiting. Soon the motor-cycle officer came in; she was over to attend to him speedily.

"Dal, boy, you got a job on yo'r hands!" murmured the Texan softly. "That filly ain't bridle-wise, and I opine that khaki boy has got his rope danglin' moughty close to huh haid—closer'n either me or Oklyhoma!"

The large blond girl emerged from the kitchen and came over to take Dal's order. Dal wasn't ready. Oklahoma entered and found a seat next the speed officer. Dal watched Julie take his order. At last the dark-haired one came over to the Texan, in friendly mood—at least she smiled.

"Miss Julie, how'd yuh like to take in a show to-night?" drawled the Texan suddenly, as she returned.

She stopped abruptly, tray lifted. "Go to a show—with you—in those togs?"

"I c'n lop off th' duds and get me a suit." He grinned.

"Sorry, Texas!" She laughed lightly. "Got a date—at the State."

That night Dal hovered about the entrance to the State. "Hmp!" He rubbed his eyes. "That cop—she don't object to that kind of duds!"

He turned away, almost dejected. He saw the aquiline-faced Oklahoma standing in a doorway, where he, too, had been an interested witness. The Texan strode up, grinning.

The slim puncher frowned. "Yuh better pick another peach if yuh plan to win that wager," he grunted.

Big Dal laughed. "And it was you steered me into the Little K. C.! How about yo'rself?"

"I ain't started. I hope yo'r taste don't change—that'll make it easy for me!"

"Uh-huh?"

"Yeah. You think I'd camp on her trail if I wasn't sure where I was at?"

"Sure? Haow?"

"She's plumb loco to marry me, now, a'ready. I ain't pushin' on th' reins—as long's you dangle yo'r rope for the same filly!"

"You kinda loco 'bout huh, too?"

Oklahoma laughed. "I kin use her—for that three thousand acres—a coupla months." The slim one shrugged his sharp shoulders.

"A coupla months?" repeated Dal slowly. "Then what?" His eyes glinted hard as diamonds.

"Quién sabe?"

The Texan drew up close to the other and met his agate gaze level-eyed. "I don't reckon yo'r the kind to marry huh," he said in low tones, "even if yuh do out-play that cop. This is more'n a gamble, Oklyhoma. That girl's too fine to be mavericked——"

"Crimes!" Oklahoma shot out the word with biting sarcasm. "Yo're jealous, cowboy—a'ready!"

"Don't run on rope, Oklyhoma! After what you said a minute ago, or hinted at, I don't reckon I'm goin' to let yuh take huh!" The Texan's jaw set.

"Yuh watch me ride!" Oklahoma strode out of the doorway and up the street, while Big Dal stared at him with strange new emotions.

In the morning when Julie hurried to his place at the counter, eyes bright and sparkling, Dal tried to grin in his old way.

"Leavin' in a day or two—for the range," he said lightly. "Yuh want to go 'long?"

"Who—me? You got a nerve, Rome-o!"

"Admit I have, Miss Julie. Say, honest, no joke"—he lowered his voice—"you c'n put yo'r brand on me, any way yuh say, Julie, girl." His clear brown eyes spoke volumes of serious meaning. "Gosh, down in th' Panhandle, you'd be queen——"

She was gone, toward the end of the counter, whither strode the ubiquitous

officer in khaki and shining puttees. Dal gulped down buckwheat cakes, ham and eggs, and left in time to meet the persistent Oklahoma coming in. Dal crossed to the triangle park a half block down, sat there until half past eleven, brain aw whirl, and came back into the Little K. C.

"Leavin' in a day or two?" she asked him. "What you leavin' so soon for?"

"Who cares if we-uns do?"

"Why don'tcha getcha a job in the city, Tex?"

"Cain't support a wife off'n the range, I reckon."

"Feelin' sad, ain'tcha?"

"Who says I am?"

"Julie reads you like a book, boy. You're the kind that feels that way with the first girl you meet off the range, Tex. Poor old Tex!"

"Honest, Julie, I ain't that kind. I mean it. Who's yo'r motor-bike friend?"

"He can make a living where I live—in town, boy!"

Dal thought about that, as she hurried away. When she returned to write his check the Texan looked up with doleful eyes.

"If I was able to make a livin' in the city, would it make any diff'rence, Julie?" he pleaded.

"It sure might. Who can tell?" Her smile was wonderful to see.

CHAPTER III.

BOUND TO GO THROUGH.

UNTIL the last customer had gone, Oklahoma Bates hung around the Little K. C. "You taken quite a shine to that big boy from Texas, ain'tcha?" he asked in low tones, as the girl cleared away his plate.

"Who let you in on it?"

"I'm in. For a lady that's practic'ly engaged, havin' corresponded with us for nigh a year, yo're a dizzy one, I'll opine! You'd be 'stonished if you savvied what that cowboy is up to!"

"Would I? Go on; spill it!"

"He's gamblin' on marryin' yuh, and totin' yuh back to Texas to win a wager!"

Her saucy, defiant look faded instantly, and she stared at him blankly. In a moment she recovered—laughed.

"I look that new? To believe that kind of junk?" she retorted.

"Take a look at this." He extended a telegram:

LOCO LOBO, TEXAS.

OKLAHOMA BATES, HOTEL DUNCAN: You and Dal better hustle with them brides. Oil struck next that three thousand acres. Offered fifty thousand dollars cash for it, and first man here with wife takes same.

THE BOYS.

She raised her straight brows; eyed him keenly. "You in on it, too," she purred softly.

"There's a dozen dames I could get to share that fifty thousand," answered Oklahoma. "Sence I'm already engaged to you, an' neck-high in love, I figgered I'd hand my own *chiquita* brunette a chance at some easy bridal money. Thuswise it came I hooked this here Texan for a bet down there with the O Bar Dot boys!"

"I understand." She smiled at him sweetly. "You had me corralled already, so you hooked him for a sure-thing bet! My, you're a smart lad, Oklahoma! If I hadn't been so handy to the stockyards, that other range dude would never have picked on me, I suppose!"

"That's about it, Maggie. And you bein' the prettiest lady in the big town, natcherly he'd glue to yuh as long's it looked hopeful. You string him along a little, Maggie, enough to keep him danglin' while you an' me arranges to corral the pot! How aboutcha for that show to-night?"

"Sure! You come around at seven thirty, you oig handsome hoss, you!"

Big Dal swung up on the stool at the Little K. C. that evening. In his pocket he had a telegram worded just as the one received by Oklahoma was worded, with one additional sentence to the effect that Dal's friends had taken odds on heavy side bets on him. Dal had promptly wired in return:

Don't put any more bets on me, I calculate on getting married and settin' down in the city.

"So you're leaving soon!" said Julie, as she came to him. "Bet you got a dame spotted that's hankerin' to go with you, cowboy!"

Dal had no intention of leaving now, but he thought he would let her think he

was. "Yes; I'm aimin' to leave, but the dame won't listen to reason."

"You goin' back to Texas—now?" she asked, frank eyes on him.

"Sure; no use hangin' round this taown any longer, I reckon."

"No job in sight, Rome-o?"

"Whyfor? Yuh mean—yuh mean if there was, you'd give me an even break—with that motor-bike cop?"

She laughed lightly, in strained effort at levity; a faint flush came to her cheeks. Suddenly a gleam of defiance blazed deep in her dark eyes.

"You getcha a job, in the city, riding red horse like Terry Casey," nodding to the speed officer, "and when you qualify for a job on the force, we'll talk turkey!"

"You'd promise?"

"Just what?"

"To marry me—if I get into a police uniform and ride a red hoss motor bike and land a reg'lar job, Julie—you promise?"

"You're on, Tex, and add that Julie won't go back to no cow ranch!"

As Big Dal left the restaurant, the brunette exchanged a word with the man in khaki.

"Terry, I'm afraid I'm in an awful mess if that cowboy lands a job. You dead sure there ain't a chance?"

"Not a chance! Force is filled up, big waitin' list, and they're cuttin' down the bike cops—four wheelers better for speeder work—take the turns better. Us bike cops'll be put in some other squads soon."

Out on the sidewalk Big Dal was strolling down toward the hotel. A hand tapped his shoulder.

Oklahoma, in new city suit of clothes, polished shoes, and soft crush hat, stood before him.

"Whyfor all this?" demanded Dal.

"Got a little date to-night."

Oklahoma shook his thin legs, incased in well-pressed trousers. He strode off toward the restaurant. Big Dal sauntered across to the triangle park and waited long enough to see Julie and the slim puncher come out together.

The Texan slouched down in the park bench and his eyes hardened. He thought of all he had heard about women being partial to tall, slim, dark men. The

motor-cycle cop was that kind, too. It wouldn't be so bad if the latter got her. But Oklahoma Bates! Dal had not mistaken his boast to win Julie, and then to desert her. Oklahoma was that kind. Dal had marked something about the man from the time he first saw him that told the slim puncher's true character.

Dal sat for a long time in a blue funk. Was the girl toying with him, about that promise, if he landed a motor-bike job? Come to think of it, she had a roguish way about her. Undoubtedly it would take a big corral to hold all the suitors and admirers she had entertained in her time.

Dal had never started a thing he did not finish, in one way or another. He decided to go through with this.

CHAPTER IV.

RIGHT ON THE JOB.

IN the morning the Texan saw Speeder Wilkins, racing expert, agent for the make of motor cycles used by the police department.

"Th' fastest danged red hoss yuh got, speeded up extry, with all the fixin's to make her buzz, you sabe?"

"I getcha, Tex. But you gotta go slow at first. Chuck them boots, and wear a cap instead of that umbreller hat—if ya want to cut air."

"I do. When do we start?"

"In fifteen minutes."

And they did. Speeder Wilkins was prepared for a double grin, for Dal Canby had remarked that he could ride anything that he could get his two legs forked on. But the grin was the other way around, for the Texan made sure he could twist the gas on and the spark off, and was gone.

It was a wabby ride, at first, it is true, but an amazing exhibition for a green man on a motorcycle, at that. Dal's long legs and his supple hulk of pure muscle enabled him to straddle and fight that two-wheeled hoss onward, touching boots to the ground when she leaned. In two minutes he was going swimmingly.

"You been on 'em before, a little?"

"Not any. Now you show me the fine points, carbyrater, etcetery."

"You'll be a demon——"

"'Tain't nothin' 'longside bulldoggin' a steer, off hossback. That's on'y a toy."

The days passed. Big Dal left the try-out speedway and mingled with the traffic, hour after hour. When he came to the Little K. C. he parked his machine a block away. He noted that Terry Casey and Oklahoma Bates were steady customers, and that Julie extended many courtesies and not a few words and smiles to Oklahoma. Twice Dal suggested a show or dance, but Julie always had a reason for declining.

"Julie, girl, yuh mean it—what yuh said?" Dal asked one evening. "Yuh stand on that? I ain't the kind to fool, yuh know, and I got yo'r promise."

"Sure you have; but maybe I'm safe. You haven't landed that job yet, uniform and reg'lar salary!"

"And when I do?"

"You already said it."

"Honest?"

"Sure, Mike!" She turned from him, flushing.

Dal called her back, a trip hammer pounding within. "And if I don't corral that job?"

"Back to the Panhandle for yours, Rome-o!"

"You ain't got a heart, Julie, girl."

"What you want for your money? Ain't Julie worth a cop's job, then, Tex?"

"Yo'r plumb worth——" Big Dal stopped, unable to express what he felt.

Next morning he put in his application at headquarters.

"Why motor-cycle squad?" queried the chief, looking him over. "Might use you mounted, or patrolman—six feet and a half, ain't you? Waive physical examination, hop, skip, and jump, rope climb, wrestle, gun work. Motor cycles full up, and we're cuttin' down."

"Motor bike or nothin'. Reckon I'll wait."

"It'll be a long wait."

Dal Canby rode away rather crestfallen. He continued to play snubbing post with the traffic, a fascinating game with him. His Texas luck did not seem to be with him. But it was only a few minutes delayed.

As he passed a quiet corner on the way to the restaurant for a late breakfast he heard a thump and crash of steel. Auto-

mobile brakes screeched and a man lay limp on the pavement, beside a fallen motor cycle.

"Leg's broke," groaned the officer, as the Texan rushed up.

Dal lifted him in his huge arms, mounted his own machine, and started for the central station.

A crowd saw the big cow-puncher ride up to headquarters with the disabled man held over the handlebars. Heedless of their questions, Dal carried his charge up the steps and into the receiving hospital adjoining the chief's office. That official came out, eyes wide. Dal gave him the number of the escaped machine.

"Some stunt you pulled with Finlayson, hangin' onto your machine," said the chief, grinning. "You're in luck; got to have a man in the Melrose district. You take Finlayson's place, temporary special officer. See Casey for a uniform."

Casey's eyes narrowed when he heard the news. He went back to the chief, Big Dal sheepishly in his wake. "No uniform here that'll fit this big boy, chief. He's away too high and thick for the biggest we got."

Murphy scratched his head. "Hire him, plain-clothes bike officer, special, Finlayson's beat. Put in order for a special uniform if he makes good." He turned to the Texan. "Keep on that cowboy rig," he proclaimed, grinning. "That'll fool 'em; stop that reckless speeding out in Melrose district!"

A few minutes later Big Dal was listening to the chief's weekly talk. "Honesty first; efficiency second. The way to hold a job in this department is to come clean. I'd forgive a man who blundered; a man who took graft, never!"

There were further instructions from Casey, honestly and frankly given—to avoid favors to any violators, whether banker or mayor—and a lot more.

Big Dal threw back his Stetson and rumped his hair. "Reckon that's easy. Prospects of makin' this job reg'lar are good. I'll have to see Julie!"

A few minutes later the cow-puncher was bowling along the boulevard. "A cowboy speed marvel afork a red hoss," chuckled Dal. "Texas luck!"

In the Little K. C. up to ten o'clock Julie had missed the big Texas for break-

fast. Shortly after that hour Oklahoma Bates entered the place, actions revealing that he had something on his mind.

"Maggie, yuh've been stringin' me along for nigh onto a year now, but yuh ain't answered my main question yet. I'm leavin' for the ranch, on the four thirty to-day, and I got to know by noon where I am at."

"My! You're rushin' things, ain'tcha, Oklahoma?"

"One o'clock at the latest I gotta know. I either got to act or lose that *dinero*—fifty thousand worth! If we're goin' to be hitched, anyway, I reckon we mought as well make a business of it with the parson before train time and head for the Panhandle and collect that fifty thousand. Now ain't that right? Listen, girlie, I wouldn't rush yuh, if it wasn't —" He broke off mysteriously and raised his black brows.

"What?" she wanted to know.

"That Texan's fixin' to hop back to Loco Lobo with a certain red-hair stenog. And we got to beat him to it!"

For a time the girl was silent, her face masked. When in a cold, indifferent voice she asked questions, Oklahoma put her off, denying that he knew any details of Big Dal's affairs other than the one main fact. That the whole story was a fabrication worried Oklahoma not one whit.

The girl wrinkled her delicate brow in thought. "I'll let you know—at one," she said, and tried to smile.

When Oklahoma Bates had gone, the scrawny blonde, Myrtle, accosted her dark-haired sister waitress.

"Oh, you fool!" she exclaimed, almost bitterly. "Why don't you let him know, one way or another? You're a catty flirt, the way you treat that poor boy. My, such a handsome fellow! If you're goin' to give him the skids, for Heaven's sake, do it!"

"Why are you so interested, my dear?"

Tears came to Myrtle's eyes, and Julie put her arms around her. "There! Don't let him break your heart, too. Bad enough for the handsome brute to wreck one young life, let alone yours!"

Myrtle shook the other from her and fled to the kitchen, drying her eyes as she went.

CHAPTER V.

NOT KNOWING THE TRUTH.

WHILE Big Dal was gliding out along the boulevard on his first job, things were happening ten blocks down the street.

It was the lull just after the noon hour at the First National Bank. Paying Teller No. 1 in his narrow cage worked mechanically before large stacks of money, some wrapped in neat packages, labeled for the armed men who would arrive with checks to take out the fifty-thousand-dollar packing-house pay roll.

The quietude of the marbled lobby was broken by the quick entry of three men. One whirled swiftly, closed the door, and jerked down the blind. The two others drew revolvers.

"Lay down on the floor!" barked one, weaving his gun before two customers at the wicket. The other covered those back of the rail.

"Git down!" repeated the second, as the cashier continued to sit at his desk. The latter official joined the others.

Bolting through the rail gate with a sack, the third robber shoveled in the stacked coin from the pay-roll pile; that done, he grabbed little canvas bags of gold from the open vault.

With the money sacks the trio rushed from the bank, guns in hand, climbed into a waiting automobile, and the driver started on the instant out along the boulevard.

The police had got the buzzer signal alarm, pressed by the cashier who had lingered a moment before going down to the floor. A telephone call a few minutes later gave details from the cashier, after the bandits had fled.

The shotgun squad and available motor-cycle officers started west, while the chief ordered on the red-light signal to all officers to call in from the Melrose district.

"Get that cow-puncher quick!" snapped the chief to his sergeant. "He's a speed marvel and will run down anything on wheels."

Big Dal's muscular figure swayed easily with the dip of the saddle of his special-model machine. The hour was one thirty, and the Texan had not eaten

lunch. His Melrose patrol was in the district of the Little K. C., and he was now on the way there for the double purpose of breaking the news of his job to Julie and having a belated meal.

Suddenly his eye caught a familiar tall, slim figure mounting up the high steps of a residence adjoining a church on his right. Dal slowed down and gazed until he satisfied himself that it was Oklahoma Bates. A neat copper sign on the dwelling contained the words: "Rev. Anthony Butler, D. D."

That roused his curiosity. Dal turned after riding half a block and proceeded slowly back. Soon Oklahoma emerged; Dal rode up to the curb.

"Hello, Dal!" greeted the cow-puncher. "You still ridin' that wind-sucker?"

"What's news, Oklyhoma?"

"Not any."

"You got dealin' with preachers of late?" Dal's eyes went to the parsonage.

"Jest a personal call." Oklahoma grinned and started off down the street.

Dal went up the boulevard a space, thinking. After a few minutes he rode back to the curb and strode up the steps to the parsonage. A kindly man of fifty came to the door at his ring.

"I'm an officer," said Dal, showing his badge. "Nothing special out of the way, but I'd like to ask what that slim hombre wanted up here a while ago."

The minister smiled. "Going to be married this afternoon at three, here at the parsonage, before going with his bride to Texas."

Dal choked back the lump in his throat, thanked the clergyman, and started down the steps. For a time he stood pondering before his machine. He wondered if Oklahoma might have shown the telegram about the value of those school lands. No; Julie wasn't the kind of girl to marry for any sum of money. But Oklahoma had in some way beaten him to his prize.

The Texan's lips tightened, as he thought of the quiet hint of Oklahoma Bates of his intentions. He determined that Julia must not sacrifice herself to this man. He grasped at a straw—he would tell her that he had landed his city job and would hold her to her promise.

Dal forked the motor cycle and turned

it toward the restaurant. As he did so a red light flashed at the corner, high among the wires, showing plainly even in daylight. That glare, as he had been told at headquarters, was a command to him to call in immediately for instructions.

His mind still in an unsettled daze over Oklahoma's wedding at three o'clock, he turned mechanically toward the call box. The hum of a rapidly approaching automobile smote his ears; it thundered down the boulevard, tore past him. Dal's glance revealed four men perched in the car, leaning forward; he caught a flash of moneybags.

"Bank messengers!" he exclaimed inwardly, checking the impulse to give pursuit. His instructions had said that bank messengers had the right of way, due to recent holdups. "I almost disremembered that," he reflected. "Got to use yo'r haid on this kind of a job."

He swung about again toward the call box. Something white bounded from the fleeing machine, a block away. Big Dal saw it; he twisted the throttle and in a minute was off the saddle. He lifted a fallen moneybag. "Gold—\$10,000" read the stenciled letters.

"Holy mavericks!" gasped the cowboy. "Those hombres didn't see it drop!" For an instant he hesitated. The unwinking red light at the crossing beckoned him. The disappearing car would be gone in a minute, probably on the way to Woodland, a near-by suburb.

Big Dal remembered the chief's words—"honesty first; efficiency second." He vaulted to the motor cycle, money sack in hand, and went after the fleeing machine.

Down the boulevard he twisted the throttle full on. The automobile was far ahead; in a moment it turned a corner.

The cow-puncher bent forward, swiftly fingered the carburetor to give in more air, and streaked down to that turn. He cut an arc from curb to curb, and whizzed on the straightaway. The fleeing car was still five blocks ahead, ripping past thinning residences toward open fields.

"Go 'long, old red hoss!" grunted the Texan, and gave the motor cycle the limit.

Another turn ahead; the car was out of sight. The bag of gold on the spark

wing of the handlebars worried the pursuer. The road was getting bumpy; his grip faulty due to the gold.

He had no thought of giving up. Hedges, trees, vacant lots, whizzed by. In his brain buzzed the thought: "Julie to be married to that coyote at three o'clock!"

He would overtake the speeding car, restore the gold, then report in on that emergency call. That done, he would have time to hustle down to have a word with Julie, tell her about his new job, remind her of her promise.

He went around the turn at perilous speed. To his surprise the auto continued as far away. "They ain't losin' any time," he reflected. Then the car turned another bend.

"What th' blue blazes!" growled Big Dal. "How many times they goin' to turn?" Then he recalled what Casey had said—that four-wheelers could outrun motor bikes on the turns.

They were going past open fields; the car ahead was buried in a cloud of dust. But now the road ran straight for several miles, and Big Dal gradually drew the auto out of its dust mantle—enough to note that the occupants of the car had seen him.

He had a sense of the road streaking in a blurred line under him; his motor cycle was fairly hopping, leaving the ground at each bump; he knew he was going ninety miles an hour, and liked it.

"The fools must think I'm tryin' to hold 'em up," he reflected. "That's what it is not to have a uniform! They couldn't be goin' any faster if they was bandits theirselves!"

They turned again.

"Go on, red hoss!" The cowboy laughed, the heat of the chase driving out the blues over Oklahoma and Julie. "The joke's on them cash toters. They don't sabe they're runnin' away from a ten-thousand-dollar bag of gold!"

He was gaining, now, over the straight-away again, over a rough dirt road. "Whoop-ee, they're watchin' me, and it shore looks like they was afraid to stop!"

No turns were possible for the car, and Big Dal gained slowly but surely. He grinned as the men in the tonneau turned their necks toward him. "Go on, red

hoss! Yuh got Texas luck with yuh! Crimes!"

A bullet zipped near his front tire. He was within hailing distance. "Hey, you, what yuh shootin' at?" Another shot struck his metal tool chest.

With the speed of the thought, Big Dal released the right grip, had his Colt at hip, and fired into the offending black gun pointed toward him. He saw the weapon jump and fall into the dust. The fleeing machine came to a stop, tires screaming.

"Whew! What's feedin' on you hombres? Yuh dropped one of yo'r moneybags back there!" The Texan was alongside the car. "Hope I didn't blister yo'r fingers none!" He grinned at the man who had fired.

The occupants of the car glanced at each other, then at the cowboy on the motor cycle, in puzzled, undetermined fashion.

Big Dal chuckled. "That's shore a joke! Me chasin' yuh to hand yuh a bag of gold. You think I was a holdup? I got the sack for yuh." He raised the gold bag.

That seemed to have an electrical effect on the men in the car, whose faces lighted up with sudden new intelligence.

"Yuh notice I'm wearin' a star," pursued the Texan. "Plain clothes—though not extry plain! Lucky I happened to see that bag drop—lucky for you-alls!"

"Thanks, officer, awfully!" the man in the rear said. "It's a pleasure to meet an honest policeman, these days. Hope you overlook me pullin' the gat on ya—you never touched my fingers—some shot! Scared you might be a bandit, in that riggin', tryin' to hold us up!"

"That's all *bueno*!" Big Dal grinned. "Tain't every day a hombre has to fight to return money to its owner! Next time, watch yuh don't drop ten-thousand-dollar sacks of gold on yo'r way, boys."

"Sure will, officer! So long, and many thanks! Here's a twenty for your trouble." The man tossed the cowpuncher a gold piece, which Dal promptly flipped back into the machine.

"Give our regards to the chief!" sang out the spokesman for the band, as the driver gave the machine a sudden start. They lifted their hands in salute and

grinned as they took the road at increasing speed.

CHAPTER VI.

A FORLORN HOPE.

BIG DAL looked at his watch. It was two o'clock. He would have to hustle to get back to Melrose Avenue and the Little K. C. in time to see Julie. She was to be married within the hour! Suddenly the intelligence dawned upon him that no girl to be wed at three would be working in a restaurant an hour before the ceremony; she would want to dress, to attend to countless other details.

Panic seized him. Fool that he was, not to have thought of that! Now his only chance would be to head off the girl and Oklahoma at the parsonage. If she would not fulfill her promise to him, then he would at least see Oklahoma and force from him a pledge to take good care of Julie; make him realize that this wager matter was serious business, and that marriage was a life contract. He would do that *my pronto!*

What was that? A police auto siren! Down the road, in the distance, Big Dal saw the red car, coming toward him. In an instant speeding motor cycles broke into view, bearing uniformed men—all racing toward him, in the direction of the disappearing bank machine.

"Thunderation!" Big Dal saw it all now. Those froglike figures on motor cycles and the squat red police machine were chasing a carload of bank robbers—and Dal had just talked to them and given them part of their spilled loot! The Texan turned a slow and sickly yellow under his bronze tan.

Instantly he acted; was on his motor again and chasing after the fleeing auto.

A frenzy of remorse, shame and chagrin drove him on with a speed that amazed himself. After five minutes he drew his six-shooter and sent a shower of bullets that he hoped might halt the four bandits. They fired a brace of shots in return; now there was no doubt of the character of the pursuit. Then something happened.

Big Dal's machine hit a bump on the road and hurtled over and over; the Texan went sprawling into a plowed field. Before his dazed vision swept a blur of

passing speed cops and the red police machine.

Slowly the cow-puncher got to his feet. He limped noticeably, but was thankful that he could walk at all. He stumbled over to his machine, saw that it was a wreck, and squatted down by the roadside.

"You big locoed hunk of a jackass!" he groaned to himself, in agony of heart. This was the end of his police career—shame, disgrace. The last argument that might have saved Julie from a scoundrel was swept away; on top of that he realized that his chances of getting back to Melrose Avenue by three o'clock were nil. On this deserted country road he would not meet a machine in half an hour. He started for the interurban tracks, a quarter mile away, limping, disgusted with himself and with the world.

There was but one solace in his misery of failure as a city speed cop—the incentive to hold down the job had gone, with the loss of Julie. If he should see her face to face now, alone here in the country, he would not be able to remind her of her promise to marry him under the conditions she had named!

Led by a forlorn hope, when he reached town on the interurban, he got off before the Melrose parsonage, went up the steps, and rang the bell. The Reverend Mr. Butler informed him that Oklahoma Bates had been married promptly on time and had started for Loco Lobo.

"I'll have to foller," muttered the Texan, and left.

CHAPTER VII.

JUST HIS SENTIMENTS.

IN the forward Pullman Dal Canby was watching, waiting. He knew Oklahoma Bates was on the four thirty flyer somewhere, although he had gone through the entire train repeatedly without finding him or Julie.

"They're likely ridin' in style in that one closed compartment," mused the cowboy, glancing toward the end of the Pullman. Big Dal leaned over and asked the porter a question.

"Suttinly! He am a big slim gent'min with black eyes and ha'r;" enlightened the darky, showing white teeth. "Honey-

moonehs, trabelin' in quality style, habin' theih meals brung in!"

Big Dal understood. Oklahoma Bates was already beginning to spend that fifty thousand dollars. The Texan rose, went into the smoker, sat there until dark, hoping Oklahoma would come out to enjoy a cigarette. The bridegroom did not—evidently the girl had not objected to smoke.

The Texan went back to his seat, hunched himself down deep in the mohair while the porter began to make up the berths. He would at least see Oklahoma in Loco Lobo. Big Dal was conscious of a woman taking the seat beside him—probably one whose berth was being made up. He did not look around; he was soured on the sex now, anyway.

He heard the whispered words, straightened, and turned slowly to face her. Julie was smiling at him in the subdued light, and then she snuggled over against his shoulder.

"Julie!" He drew from her in sudden revulsion. "What yuh doin' here, girl—away from that stateroom? Oklyhoma'll not like it, findin' yuh sittin' here with me!"

She stiffened, recoiled, moved to the seat in front, facing him. She heard his biting words: "Yuh ought to be ashamed, to act that a way!"

"Oh!" She flung herself away quickly. She was gone to the vestibule, from the car. Big Dal sat scowling. He strode back to the smoker, puffed at innumerable cigarettes, and near midnight crawled into his berth and tried to sleep.

Toward morning he heard low, angry words at the end of the car, as of a man and woman quarreling. The train had stopped at a small station. The porter hustled past his berth and out toward the stateroom. There was a sound of slamming grips. All grew quiet again.

In the morning, as the factotum of the Pullman closed up the berths he winked a rolling whitish eye. "Honeymonehs split up las' night, mistah." He chuckled. "Seems laik she seen a compromiserin' telegram in his pocket, jedgin' f'om theih quarrelin' words, an', Lawdy, she up an' lit right out to sta't back home!"

Big Dal thought swiftly. That was a serious matter, right after those two had

been married. He decided to interview Oklahoma immediately.

From the dressing room came dark-haired Julie, and took the seat two sections down. Big Dal's amazed eyes followed her every movement, and then he rose and seated himself beside her.

"I don't know whether I'm dreamin' or awake, Miss Julie," he began slowly, "or whether I'm plumb locoed. That porter jest told me you left the train early this mornin'."

Her chin was high, her eyes saucy. "He meant that I'm leaving at the next station, to go back to the hash in the Little K. C.," she said coldly.

"I'm sure plumb sorry—if that Oklyhoma didn't treat yuh right, after marryin' yuh that a way. I'll bust him for that, Miss Julie!"

She fixed him with an intent stare that gradually mellowed into a wide-eyed questioning. Her winsome lips opened slowly. "You certainly must be locoed, Rome-o! Where'd you get that stuff?"

He read the truth in her eyes. "You—and Oklyhoma wasn't—married?" he demanded. "It was some other girl?"

"Why, of course, silly!" Her level glance reproved him. "That's what you meant, then——"

"Julie, it ain't true! You single yet! What you doin' on this train, bound for Texas? Tell me that, Julie girl!"

"Oh, Tex! I knew Oklahoma lied when he said you was elopin'. I wanted you to win that fifty thousand, since you landed the police job and promotion, anyway——"

"Elope—police job—promotion? You wanted me to win—what fifty thousand?"

"Oh, you never mentioned that wager—if you had, you'd have lost it sure! Oklahoma and I were plannin' to get married, true enough, till he showed me that telegram about the wager—till he started to use me for a sure-thing come-on to hook you, boy! Then I was through with him. But I didn't want him to know it, for fear he'd take Myrtle and start for Texas—when you deserved to win!"

"For the love of dogies! This is gettin' worse! Oklyhoma and Myrtle?"

"Yeh, Rome-o! Yesterday morning Oklahoma sprung it on me that you was

pickin' up a stenog and startin' on the flyer, but Terry told me how you landed that job, and I knew that cowboy lied. Demanded his answer by one o'clock, and I had to give it. Then that scalawag and Myrtle arranged for the elopement right off!"

"Oklyhoma and the blond——"

"I found it out. I tried to get you, Tex—you proved you really—liked—me by landin' that police job, and givin' that fifty thousand the go-by. I tried to find you, boy, to tell you for Heaven's sake if you was goin' to marry me, anyway, do it right off, and we'd hop to Loco Lobo and beat Oklahoma and Myrtle to it!"

"But—you didn't find me!"

"That preacher phoned the Little K. C. sayin' a policeman was there; wanted to know if anything was crooked about the weddin'. He said the officer was followin' Oklahoma to Texas. So I hustled out and went to the depot, and there you was gettin' on the train, without any skirt around, either! Well, I bought me a ticket and packed in, without even gettin' a change of clothes. Believe me, Tex, I'd never have done it, scarcely, if it wasn't for the kick I got outa that newspaper extry!"

"What extry?"

"Didn't you see it?" Her voice rose to an excited treble. She snatched a paper from the seat beside her. He read flaring display type:

SPEED COP BATTLES AND DEFEATS BANDITS.

New officer, cowboy marvel, proves hero, trailing fast robber car for miles, fights gun battle until reinforcements come up—shot from motor cycle at last. Dal Canby wanders in daze from scene. Chief still hunting him with promotion as prize for his heroism.

"For the great——" Dal's amazed features worked strangely, softened, and lighted up slowly. "Texas luck! Julie girl, let's go back and get that motor-bike job, now that Oklyhoma ain't runnin' off with my little angel, after all. Then we c'n get married, and go to Loco Lobo so's Pop Lithgow and the boys c'n collect——"

"Not on your life, Rome-o! Oklahoma'd sure patch it up with Myrtle, that bird would, and come back on the next

train. You go look up a preacher on this boat. And if you can't find him, we'll be married in Loco Lobo—that is, if you still want me, boy!"

"Still want yuh! Julie, honey girl!"

"And as for that motor-bike job—nothing doing, Tex! I ain't got any time for that stuff, even if my brother Terry——"

"Brother Terry! That hombre Casey?"

"Yes; he is! And I'm crazy to live on a ranch. Have been right along. But I didn't want to be a mere stake in a cowboys' wager—and that's why I talked motor cop. Let's forget about the city, Tex, and live like kings and queens down in Texas!"

"Oh, Julie—you angel doll! Yuh shorely said my sentiments. And now we know where we are at!"

A tall, slim figure hovered over the seat. For a moment Oklahoma Bates stared at these two and shrugged. They were too busy looking at each other to see him. The whistle sounded for the station, and the cow-puncher seized his grip and hurried out. The porter heard him mutter something that sounded like "Adios Loco Lobo" and "Texas luck!"

Quite Poetical

THEY skated together, but little they said, for they'd just been made known to each other. But he wished, as across the bright surface they sped, that through life they might thus go together.

A crash! They were through!

"Oh, how awkward!" cried she. "Tisn't deep, but has any one seen us?"

"Never mind. Let me tell you I love you," said he, "since the ice is now broken between us."

All That Was Needed

THE theater was in an uproar.

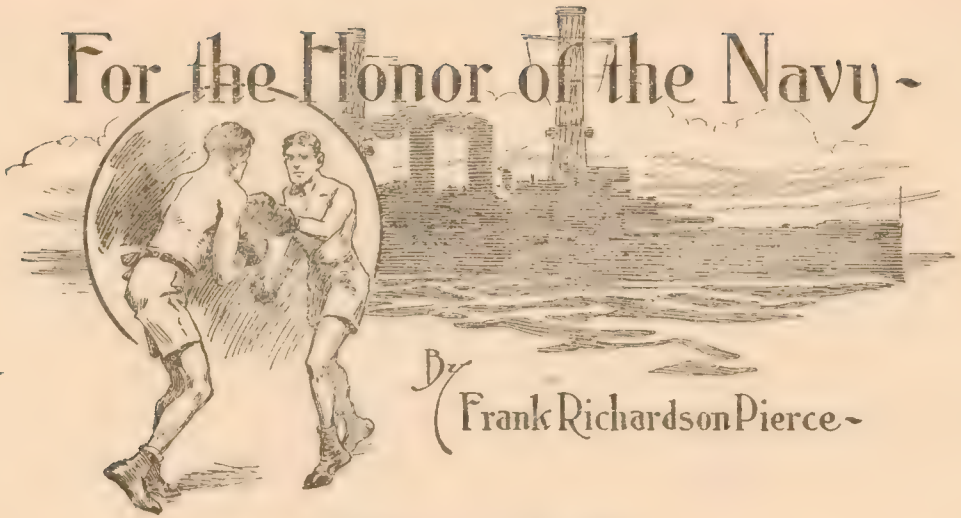
"They're calling for the author," said the stage manager.

"Oh, but I can't make a speech!" replied the man who wrote the play.

The manager grabbed the trembling writer firmly and impelled him along the passage. As he shoved him toward the curtain he said curtly:

"Well, just go out in front and tell 'em you're sorry."

For the Honor of the Navy -



By
(Frank Richardson Pierce -

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

TO REDEEM A PROMISE.

THE skipper's voice boomed directly behind Bos'n's Mate Ray Stuart: "Bos'n's Mate Stuart report to the captain at once!" The young man straightened up from examining a number of letters in his ditty box and stared at the loud speaker. It was a labor-saving device, and bos'n's mates were saved the trouble of passing the word from compartment to compartment to the tune of the pipe. By merely pressing a key, speaking in a normal tone of voice in any portion of the dreadnaught, the speaker's voice would boom forth in every other compartment.

Only the newer vessels were so equipped, thus it was not surprising that a bos'n's mate from the older vessels was startled when his captain's voice interrupted the privacy of the reading of love letters from the only girl. He almost muttered, "Aye, aye, sir!" before he caught himself. Hurriedly closing the box, he began the rather long journey to the skipper's cabin.

It was apparent that Stuart was a man of importance. Shipmates from ordinary seamen to chief petty officers stopped him with a friendly word. "Discharged today, eh? Lucky dog! Well, don't get stranded on the beach. Remember there's

always a home in the navy, but before you come back attend to that little job!"

"I'm not coming back," Stuart replied. Some detected a note of regret mixed with satisfaction. When a man has a sweetheart ashore awaiting his coming, also a position—not a job, but a position—he is entitled to be satisfied with the world. "Also," he added in parting, "I'll attend to that little job before anything else."

Stuart slipped into the skipper's office. "You passed the word for me, sir?" he queried respectfully.

The skipper smiled. "Be seated, my boy!"

The skipper was a hard-boiled sailor of the old school, but he did not look it as he sat at his desk in golf costume. He liked to fight and had within the last three years whaled an ensign right merrily with the gloves. He regarded Stuart's deep chest, broad shoulders, and slim waist with admiration.

"Color good, eyes bright!" he grunted. "You'll do. Better attend to that little job, Stuart, before you lose the conditioning navy life has given you!"

"Yes, sir!"

"I called you in to wish you luck in anything you undertake on the beach, but particularly the business of whipping 'Roughhouse' Hampton. The navy will be watching you with confidence! And, my boy, I know the struggle that is go-

ing on in your mind between love and a promise you made to your shipmates two years ago when Roughhouse Hampton committed the unpardonable sin of running out on a match with a better man. Better a thousand times to go down in a glorious defeat, giving the best there is in you, than to side-step a contest and hug the tattered shreds of a championship about your skulking form.

"I'm talking to you as man to man, Stuart," the skipper continued. "You weren't on my ship at the time, but I saw you enter the ring, fight ten furious rounds, and take a knock-out from Roughhouse Hampton, and no one knew that you entered the ring a sick man until weeks later, and then they didn't hear it from you. The navy has the whole story now and that's why it cheered you to the echo when you promised that your first duty as a civilian would be to sign up for a contest with Hampton and wipe out the stain he left when he wore the uniform and side-stepped a scrap. We're pulling for you to the last man, and we'll back you to the limit. It's for the honor of the navy. The only thing we are afraid of is that Hampton will run out on you."

"He'll not do that, sir, because he is confident he can defeat me. Another thing, he is money-mad, and such a contest will draw a huge crowd of service men. He is smarting under the razzing the boys have given him for his side-stepping and nothing would suit him better than to defeat me again with the navy boys looking on. The contest is assured."

The skipper smiled, then became serious. "And the little girl?"

"A promise is a promise, sir. I hope to make her see my position. If she won't—well, I'll go ahead with it, sir!"

The skipper, confident that no upstart ensigns were observing, kicked traditions and regulations aside. He thumped Stuart lustily on the back, then shook hands warmly.

"Good luck!" he exclaimed. "It'll come out right. Real love becomes stronger in hardship. I know the little girl; she'll line up with you with her full strength of a hundred pounds, but the father—ugh!" The skipper shuddered.

"He's an old firebrand, the best scout in the world among his friends, but I've seen him snort fire when in contact with his political enemies down at the State capitol!"

The skipper was still shaking the bos'n's mate's hand as he ushered him to the door. An ensign blinked his eyes and was deeply pained at the scene. Queer how a lowbrow could enter the navy, squirm through the academy and eventually take command of one of the latest dreadnaughts! Very queer!

CHAPTER II.

AS A MATTER OF DUTY.

THE romance between Ray Stuart and Rose Sheldon dated from high school. It survived the excitement of the war and grew stronger while she attended a finishing school and he took advantage of the educational facilities Uncle Sam offers his enlisted men. Thus while he attained a practical education, he managed also to save a good portion of his pay which he invested in a concern engaged in navy subcontracting work.

During this period Barton Sheldon had become governor of his State and, except for a tendency to take the bit in his teeth at times, was proving a good one.

It is not every honorably discharged enlisted man who is greeted by the governor's car and daughter on his return to civilian life. Rose drove the car down herself, and it was big enough to transport a race boat's crew and the boat included. She seemed tiny when she squirmed behind the wheel and slipped into the traffic.

"Last night you slept in a hammock, and to-night you sleep in the governor's mansion," she remarked. "Won't that be exciting?"

"I don't care where I sleep just so I'm within calling distance of you." He glanced defiantly at the traffic and gave her an enthusiastic hug.

"Not here, Ray!" she pleaded in a most unconvincing tone.

"The last few months have dragged," Stuart went on. "If I hadn't thrown myself into study I'd have been down on the records as a deserter by this time."

He lapsed into a moody silence and when traffic permitted she gave him a quick, worried glance. With feminine intuition she guessed he was struggling with some sort of a problem.

"Ray!"

He came to his senses with a jerk, then smiled, but back of the smile she saw a glint of his seriousness fade slowly.

"That is better."

He was silent a moment, then pointed to an office building. "If you can find parking space, would you mind stopping a few minutes, Rose? I've a little business that can't wait now that I am ashore!"

"We'll find parking space if it'll take that worried look from your face. This is our great day, next to the greatest, and we are going to be happy. Get the business over with!"

She spoke crisply, and Stuart realized much of her father's directness had been passed on to the daughter.

By placing her bumper gently against a flivver and applying the power she shoved the flivver ahead and found room enough. With a glow of pride she watched Stuart swing up the street. "Much better looking," she told herself, "and more confidence than when he left. He is determined and aggressive. I suppose our wills will clash at times, but—it'll be wonderful to make up. I'm glad I waited!"

Before an office overlooking the city, Stuart paced nervously. "I know what it means," he muttered, "but I'll go ahead with it, and now's the time. An uncertain man never gets along in this world." Almost savagely he threw open the door and entered.

A quick, nervous little man glanced up and then leaped from his chair. He acted as if he were greeting several thousand dollars. He was. "'Slumgullion' Ray in the flesh!" he bellowed. "Here's the fountain, pen; sign on the dotted line. Roughhouse Hampton's name has been on the contract for months. How you feeling? Looking fine!"

"Feeling fine!" replied Stuart. To the little man's amazement Stuart signed without asking a question or reading the contract; no haggling over terms or price.

When the little man had assured himself it was all real by blotting the signature, he blinked. "The terms——" he began.

"Not interested, Mr. Hough."

"You act like a movie hero doing some duty at a great sacrifice out in the boundless West, where men are men and do their duty as the Lord gives them sight to see it," rambled Hough, again glancing at the signature.

"I'm coming through on a promise, and that's the main idea," replied Stuart; "and say, tell the reporters to tone down the Slumgullion Ray stuff."

Hough nodded, though he knew reporters would do nothing of the sort. When the elevator door had slammed, Hough gently touched the signature with his index finger. "Yep; it's there, both of 'em, but I can't figure it."

He looked down onto the street and caught a bird's-eye view of Ray Stuart stepping into a car that seemed mostly top and hood from that altitude. When he turned at the next corner Hough gasped.

"That's the governor's car! Ah, I remember now; there was some sort of a kid romance. H'm! Gosh the fur will fly when old Sheldon finds out who Slumgullion Ray is. Well, it's nothing in my young life. This bout is legal, and the more noise there is, the bigger the gate. Most of the navy will be here, sure!"

With this comment Hough called the reporters on the telephone. "Come down here, got a signature I want to show you. Also some pictures to go with the story!"

CHAPTER III.

A DARK, TRAGIC DAY.

ON the way to the State capitol, Ray Stuart planned to spread the cards out before Rose, yet when he opened his mouth to speak, the words refused to come. This, as she said, was their great day. Only one day greater was in store for them—the wedding day. It was not fear of consequences that silenced him. He had never side-stepped anything yet, but he could not bring a shade of unhappiness to the sweet face that turned to him so often as she outlined the future's plans.

"Perhaps, to-night," he said to himself, "when the time is right! If not, then tomorrow! She'll understand!"

Governor Sheldon greeted him cordially, then plunged into politics. "Now, dad," Rose warned, "this is a happy event, so don't work yourself up into a state of high indignation. Don't discuss either the budget or boxing. Remember the two B's are tabooed."

"All right," the governor said with a smile, then promptly plunged into boxing. "We've got the fight crowd in a hole!" He chuckled. "They made a big noise and got people to believing the public demanded prize fights. The present State law permits contests, but not for money. They've been getting around it by giving the fighters loving cups. Then the fighter pawns his cup to the promoter for a few thousand dollars and never redeems. Get the idea?"

"It would seem, then, best to legalize contests of a professional nature," Stuart returned. "The old law was made years ago and served a good purpose when most fighters were recruited from bar-rooms and back alleys; but it is different now. The new type of fighter comes from good families frequently and looks more like a college man than a pug. Everywhere the public is patronizing boxing bouts, so why should not the State legalize it?"

"Enough!" exclaimed the governor. "Two bills have been introduced. One abolishes the old law, the second legalizes ten-round no-decision bouts. Both have passed one house and are sure of passing the other. I shall approve the first and veto the second. This State will be free from the cries of a brutal mob watching men beat one another to a pulp. The house cleaning will be thorough from that standpoint!"

"Ever see a boxing contest?"

"No; and don't want to!"

"Ever see football, baseball, rowing?"

"What red-blooded man hasn't?"

"Ever yell?"

"Sure! How can a man keep still when the home team knocks a home run with the bases full, or the half back from the old college team rips off a forty-yard run for a touchdown?"

"Sure you weren't yelling for blood!"

"Tut, tut, Raymond! I'm afraid you approve of prize fighting?"

"Boxing!"

"All the same, Raymond."

"Now, father and Ray, there'll be no more arguing. Let's talk about something pleasant!"

Stuart enjoyed the luxury of a bed the following morning until a newspaper boy on a bicycle dropped the newspaper on the mansion steps. From the second-story window Stuart was still trying to make out the headlines when a fair hand appeared and the paper vanished. He caught the flash of a diamond in the early-morning sun and the next instant was fully awake. Undoubtedly there was something in the sport page of interest. He dressed hurriedly and descended to find Rose Sheldon cold and white.

"Didn't expect to find you up so early," he said uneasily.

"Is that you?" she demanded.

Stuart took the extended paper from her hand, and the headlines on the page screamed defiance at him. There was a large picture of himself in fighting pose and beneath the words: "Slumgullion Ray, Navy Battler."

He read only the first paragraph, but it was sufficient:

"Slumgullion" Raymond Stuart proved his eagerness to tear into Roughhouse Hampton and wipe the stain of defeat from his mind by signing to fight Hampton before the ink on his honorable discharge was dry. The coming battle will undoubtedly prove one of the fiercest ever fought in this section.

Stuart tossed the paper onto a table. The reporter had used terms and descriptions that would appeal to a fight gallery instead of a young woman of refinement who knew boxing only by reputation. It could not have been worse from Stuart's standpoint.

"Is that you?" she repeated dully.

"Yes, Rose. Let me explain!"

She shook her head slowly. "That explains everything. That picture and the disgusting name beneath, Slumgullion."

"A nickname my shipmates gave me," he said quickly, in the hope of holding her interest. She was twisting the engagement ring slowly toward the end of her finger, as if compelled, yet reluctant, to remove it. "They called me

Stew instead of Stuart at first. Well, Slumgullion is the navy term for stew. Listen, Rose, before you condemn me. The navy and boxing taught me a number of things many of us overlook. It taught me self-reliance and courage, neither of which I had developed to any great degree when I enlisted. It taught me to accept blows as well as receive them. I think, and hope, it taught me to be a good winner as well as a good loser. The least I can do for what it has done to me is to keep my promise to meet Hampton."

"Is that all, Ray?"

If she had called him Mr. Stuart it would have made him thoroughly angry, but the note in the "Ray" hurt him through and through. For a moment he wavered. What was a bout compared to a life's happiness, what of a promise—Yes; that was it. The bout was an incident to him, though the main thing to his former shipmates.

"Won't you give it up, Ray?"

"No," he answered slowly; "I can't! I had counted on your understanding. I tried to make you see it as I see it. I thought of it constantly yesterday, but remained silent because it was our first day together and I didn't want to mar it."

"Why did you go direct and sign the contract to meet this man?"

"Mostly because I was afraid I'd weaken when I faced you. I can defy the world, but not my heart where you are concerned. Now I'll have to go through with it. The public will demand it. Even you would shrink from me if I ran away!"

She regarded him thoughtfully. Nothing she did was impulsive, and that made it certain she would not retract anything she did. The fingers trembled as they removed the ring. Mechanically he accepted it. "I'm sorry, Ray!" Then she turned away.

Presently he stirred leaden feet and ascended the stairs. He packed his suit case grimly and descended. At the door he paused and looked back. He thought he heard a suppressed sob. He was an idiot; it wasn't worth it! The door opened a trifle and she stood there with eyes dim with tears.

"Is it worth it, Ray?" she queried softly.

The girl loved him. Never was he more certain of that than at this moment. She was fighting for what she believed was right. He admired her for that.

"No," he said; "nothing justifies the misery of this hour, yet I've got to go through with it!"

He found himself moving swiftly down the walk. The beauty of the mansion grounds was lost on him. He saw only a winding trail of concrete leading to darkness. He resented the singing birds in near-by trees; the joyous shout of a boy hailing a playmate. A long auto stage rumbled into view. He boarded it and left happiness behind. The stage driver, ignorant boob, remarked that it was a fine day. Stuart lied and agreed with him. It was a dark, tragic day.

CHAPTER IV.

THOROUGH IN ALL THINGS.

NEWSPAPER reports said that Stuart was not training seriously. It was hinted he was merely interested in the loser's end of the purse. Stuart read them without comment and continued to go through the motions of training. From a safe distance a reporter hinted at romance shattered. The reporter had been in love many times and knew the signs. He smelled a whale of a story, but at the same time he respected Stuart's "right."

Stuart walked toward his interviewer. He had once heard the only way to silence a newspaper man is to take him into your confidence, then put him on his honor not to mention a word. "Tell the men covering this affair I want them to meet me at dinner to-night. Make it seven o'clock. I go to bed at nine."

A dozen gathered around the table and waited until the dinner was over, then Stuart spoke. "In confidence," he said briefly, "the rumors of romance are true. The engagement was broken, but I had to carry this thing through. When, and if, there is a story to release I'll give you all an even break. In the meantime I trust you to say nothing. I am telling you this because some of you might take

a shot at the facts for luck and cause Miss Sheldon embarrassment, and then I'd have to break a head or two which would not improve things." Having put them into the hole, he excused himself.

One reporter groaned. "I've dug up the facts just as he presented 'em. What a dub I was for coming to-night! Now I can't publish that story. And my paper is unfavorable to the governor, too."

Reports of poor condition and little training continued until at length the skipper of a certain dreadnaught canceled several engagements, chucked golf togs for business clothing, and proceeded cityward. He appeared at training quarters and crooked a compelling finger at Stuart. "Come here!" the skipper ordered.

It was the first order Stuart had heard in weeks. It made him feel good. "Aye, aye, sir!"

The skipper looked him over critically. "These newspapers are all hammering you. Why? You look trained to the minute. Are you?"

"Yes, sir! I was always in training in the navy, and naturally it has taken no great effort to stay in condition. Do you think, after what I've lost to go through with this contest, that I'm not going to win, sir?"

"Ah, so that's it, eh? She's firm?"

Stuart nodded miserably.

"Gad, boy, that took courage! Real courage! Somehow I admire both of you. I'm going to take a hand in this thing. Tut, tut! Just because you are out of the service don't think you can give me any back talk. I'm going to stick my finger in the pie!" He frowned at Stuart. "Now keep right along training; you're on edge. Let 'em think you are loafing on the job, and now that I know you're not I don't care what the others think. The men are all applying for shore leave for next Friday night!"

From training quarters the skipper returned to his ship. He wasn't fool enough to believe he understood women, but he prided himself on the fact that he had learned a thing or two by personal experience. When in full uniform, gold braid, and everything, his wife seemed to regard him as a sort of impressive stranger with whom she hoped to become

better acquainted. Furthermore when in uniform sweet young things were glad to have him walk on their feet and call it dancing. On the other hand the only time his wife ever lectured him was when she caught him in a bath robe, bathing suit, or civilian clothing. So, too, when in civilian clothing the sweet young things sought younger company.

The skipper dressed in his best and in due time appeared at the governor's mansion, where he was informed by a flustered servant that the governor was evidently not expecting him because he was out.

"I am calling on Miss Sheldon!" he announced and the flustered young woman conducted him to the drawing-room and asked him to be seated.

When Rose appeared, she counted the stripes on his sleeve—"one, two, three, four. Let's see. One stripe, ensign; one and a half, j. g. lieutenant; two, lieutenant; two and a half, lieutenant commander; and—he's nothing less than a captain." All this was mental. She was impressed until he mentioned his purpose, then she frowned. The skipper plunged forward. The way to win a position is to carry it by storm. He stormed Rose Sheldon as no lovesick ensign ever had stormed her.

"Don't try to fool an old man like I am," he said: "down in your heart you admire courage. A man who is true to himself and his pledged word can be depended upon to the utmost. Do you think he is happy? Far from it. Neither are you."

"But it is all so cheap," Rose returned. "He is not considering me at all. The name, Slumgullion, in headlines. Ugh! It is sickening. 'Slumgullion Stuart marries governor's daughter.'" She shuddered.

"Listen, young woman; they pinned a medal on me during the war. Men have died in vain for such medals. I didn't deserve it, but I got it and prize it, yet I prize more the nickname the enlisted men gave me years ago. The men give nicknames to the men they love and respect, or the men they ridicule. They called me, and still call me, 'Bel-lowing Billy Lee!' My wife nearly died of mortification when she heard it. She

calls me that herself now in her charitable moments.

"Now, my dear," the skipper went on, "remember boxing is not as bad as it is painted; that it made many a timid chap into a real man during the late war, and that the most of it nowadays is clean. Search your heart deeply and then do as your judgment thinks is just. There's a lad fighting two battles next Friday night, and that is one more than it is fair for him to take on at one time. A little note, perhaps, will make him equal to anything, and he belongs to you, heart and soul, as my observing old eyes tell me you belong to him. Good-by, Miss Rose!"

She watched him swing down the path. "Well of all things!" she explained, then became very thoughtful.

Bellowing Billy Lee, United States navy, was thorough in all things he did. Near the capitol building he took his bearings and laid a course for the executive offices. He was steaming down the hall at cruising speed when a door opened and a man came from an office as if he had been thrown out. This individual picked up his hat, jammed it onto his head, and hurried from view.

"Hell's bells," exclaimed the skipper, "a lot of things are happening hereabouts! The arms and hands that started that fellow on his way had a gubernatorial appearance or I'm mistaken."

He pushed gently against the door. It opened, and he found himself in the governor's private office. Sheldon's eyes blazed, and he started toward the door "Well of all things!" he exclaimed, then he calmed somewhat.

"Pardon me, governor, for slipping through the back way, but I thought it would save fuss and feathers. I'm informal when I can get away with it. If you have an engagement I'll shove off immediately."

"Nothing for a half hour yet." The governor paced the room nervously. "I just threw a man out!" he snapped.

"And did a mighty good job of it!"

"The happiness of my daughter is everything! As long as I've been in office I have never even been tempted to accept a bribe, and they've come my

way in the most diplomatic wrappings; yet just now a man offered to stop the Stuart-Hampton contest if I'd sign the boxing bill. He pointed out it would be an easy way out for Stuart and it would mean happiness for my little girl. The dirty cur! How did he find out our private affairs?"

"That's why you hate boxing, governor. You meet the riffraff, but not the gentlemen. Happiness would not lie that way. Stuart is not in this thing for money, but honor. If it is stopped here, it will take place elsewhere. Did you ever see a boxing bout?"

"No! I don't care to!"

"It's been my observation, taking humanity down the line from presidents and kings to tramps, that the biggest men try to be fair and impartial, and yet when you strike their pet aversion they are narrow and unfair. You, governor, are unfair in your attitude toward boxing, because you have never seen a contest! I want you to accompany me Friday night!"

"What!"

"Exactly!"

"What will people think? The governor of a great State in a maddened throng lusting for the blood of fellow human beings!"

"You are wrong. It is a sporting proposition, pure and simple. We have contests repeatedly aboard ship. As for what people will say? Huh! Many a governor has occupied a ringside seat, and, besides, I never knew you to worry about the comments of the people. What time shall I call?"

"It's never been put up to me like this before. You are right. I shall attend a fight before I veto that bill!"

CHAPTER V.

CHARGED WITH ENTHUSIASM.

THE girl was dressed quietly, and but few recognized her as she parked a coupé in a small space and hurried toward a huge arena. She seemed lost, but no one apparently cared. Presently she was swept along with a crowd that pressed tighter and tighter until breathing became difficult. Fully half of them were uniformed men. On the lips of

ail she heard a single name spoken: "Good old Slumgullion!" She caught the affectionate note in the phrase.

A voice was shouting: "Everybody hold his own ticket! Everybody hold his own ticket!"

A hand tore her ticket in half; the mob ignored her, thought only of self, and carried her on. Presently a youth seated her and hurried away. Men! Men! Men! All kinds, poor, well dressed, game sports, and quitters! Every class of humanity was there. Not in the theater or on the football field would one find a duplicate gathering. Here and there Rose recognized men prominent and respected in life.

Suddenly a hush settled over the throng, then a renewed buzz. With a start she caught sight of her father and Bellowing Billy Lee! Now, the governor's name was on everybody's lips. Apparently the crowd approved. "Say what you like, the old boy is trying to be fair!" said some one.

As in a dream she saw youthful men in bath robes enter the ring, whale away, then leave, one victor, one vanquished. She peeped at a tiny note in her hand.

DEAR RAY: I tried to phone you. I want you to come to me after this is over with, whether you win or lose. I am beginning to understand your attitude, so that is why I shall give you this as you pass down the aisle, if I can't reach you before. ROSE.

She was startled from her reflections by a deafening cheer. The sea of blue-jackets around her leaped up like angry waves. The very air seemed charged with their enthusiasm. One name was on the thousands of lips. They spoke it possessively. The world might own many things, but not good old Slumgullion!

She looked back and saw him coming. He was smiling, but she saw beyond the smile. Hands were reaching forth and slapping him on the back. He tried to speak to them all while his seconds fought to clear the way. At first she shrank back, then with sudden defiance she leaned forward, note in hand. She touched his muscular arm and felt a possessive thrill. He turned, then some one brushed her extended hand aside with a gruff: "Gangway, lady!"

"Ray!" she called, but the battle cry, "Good Old Slumgullion!" drowned her voice. He passed on, squeezed through the ropes, and took a seat in his corner.

Several rows of seats ahead, Bellowing Billy Lee was having troubles of his own. Out of ten thousand people the one objectionable man in the place had to take a seat beside the governor. His mood was mellow, besides he was an expansively built citizen and spilled over into the chairs on either side.

He addressed the governor genially: "Can't quite place you, but I've sure seen you before somewhere." He blinked alcoholically at the ropes within ten feet of his eyes. "Seats are good, but they put the ring too far away, m'friend!" He strained his eyes. "Can you see what's going on? I can't!"

The governor took in what was taking place. The skipper reached behind Sheldon and punched the other in the ribs, pointing vigorously at the ring. "What's that, m'friend? Oh, yes! They're fighting there, but the ring's too far away."

The skipper gave it up. A moment later the gong sounded.

CHAPTER VI.

A REWRITTEN ENDING.

IT was a merry battle from the first. The two men, each confident, wasted no time on preliminaries. They had met before and each knew the other's style. How either man survived the torrid sixth round was the subject of considerable comment in the sporting pages next day.

In the sixth Hampton went down for the count of nine. He clinched in desperation and, as Stuart sought to shake him off, his eyes caught sight of something that startled him. They widened with amazement. The governor's presence had given Stuart a jolt, but the girl— He couldn't understand. She half stood up and waved her hand to signify all was well. She wanted him to understand, to put aside the mental battle and win the physical struggle.

In that brief interval Hampton's eyes narrowed. He struck with the fullness of his strength, then stepped back. Stuart pitched forward on his face while the referee tolled the count. The thou-

sands of uniformed men rose as one. "Come on, Slum! Come on, Slum!" It resembled college rooting. It was a mighty prayer from their hearts.

"Out of it, lad! Out of it!" bellowed the skipper. Bellowing Billy Lee did not gain the nickname by accident. There was a sound as well as loud reason for it.

"Who's down?" shouted the genial citizen. "I can't see the ring. Who's down, m'friend?"

"Dry up!" snapped the governor testily. "Stuart's down!"

The governor steadied himself by clutching the other's head, then stood in his chair. "Get up, Ray!" he pleaded. "Get up!"

The skipper observed that the governor was yelling louder than any one but himself, and he wasn't yelling for blood either.

"Nine!" droned the referee.

The limbs responded to the iron will. Ray Stuart tottered to his feet, instinctively guarded his jaw, and fell into a clinch. With victory in his grasp Hampton fought furiously to get in another blow. Then came the bell!

With a sigh that changed to applause the crowd settled back.

A navy second whispered instructions in Stuart's ear. He nodded. The gong! And with it the crowd stood up, for a man on the verge of being put out had streaked across the ring and was carrying the fight to his opponent almost before he had left his chair.

Hampton's confident smile vanished. His face became serious, then desperate. He squirmed free, but there was no denying the other. He chased him all over the ring, crowded him against the ropes, and suddenly stood back. Hampton slipped to the canvas. The skipper saw the swift blow, a few others who were watching saw it, but the crowd saw only the victor reel to his corner and wait while the fatal ten was counted over the vanquished.

The skipper wanted to be first into the ring, but the governor beat him by a nose, thanks to stepping on a newspaper man's back. "My boy, my boy, such courage!" He wrung Stuart's hand, then brushed his own hand across misty eyes. "It took me from myself. For a moment

I ceased to be anybody but a being mad with excitement."

Ray Stuart listened with his ears while his eyes roved over the crowd. She was lost—submerged in uniforms and waving hands. Skipper and governor escorted "their man" from the ring.

"I'll take you home," the governor said authoritatively.

Stuart was dressed now; the skipper had given him a parting thump.

"Now, my boy, what——"

Sheldon jammed on the brakes. Traffic ahead was in a jam. Several cars ahead there was a coupé. Stuart stretched his neck, then hurriedly departed. He squirmed crabwise between fenders, and ducked into the coupé just as the traffic moved.

"Oh, Ray!" she cried. "Be careful, you impetuous boy, or I'll be running into somebody."

"Turn down a side street," he ordered; "the longest way around is the shortest home in a traffic jam."

An observant newspaper man followed for just one block, then headed for his typewriter. "That romance yarn can be released," he reflected, "but I'll have to rewrite the ending."

From Frying Pan to Fire

LAKE was delighted with his new car. It combined speed with comfort to perfection, and the proud owner, glowing with satisfaction, watched the speedometer steadily rising—twenty, thirty, thirty-five miles an hour—until the car seemed positively to be flying along the road.

Then suddenly a policeman came in sight, and holding out a hand, signaled to Lake to stop.

"What is it?" the motorist asked irritably, as the car slowed down.

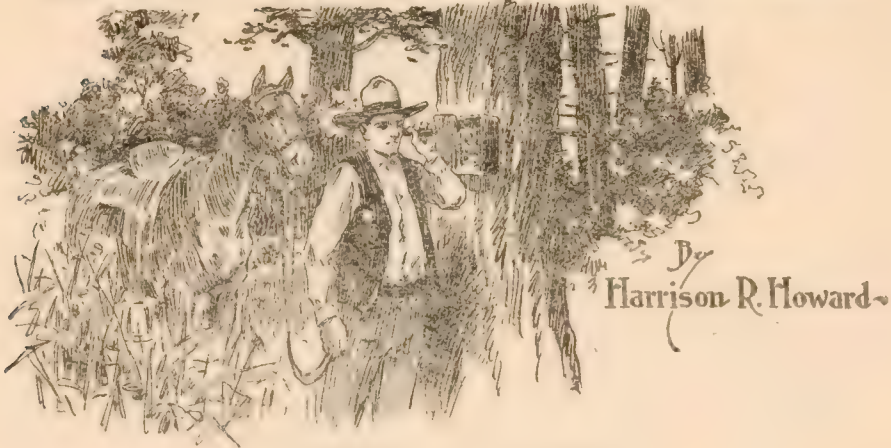
"Well, sir, I must——"

"Oh, nonsense!" retorted Lake. "I was only going fifteen an hour."

The car shot forward again. Two minutes later he ran into a huge obstruction, and when he had succeeded more or less in patching his shattered self together, Lake murmured faintly to his chauffeur:

"I wonder, after all, if that policeman merely wanted to warn me that a tree had fallen across the road!"

Law Inescapable —



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

FACING A BIG QUESTION.



DAWN sun was kindling the crowns of the mighty firs as Sinclair's weary animal won from the chill depths of a dell pass and bore down upon a long straightaway of trail across the plateau of virgin timber. The deputy sheriff of Fire Pine rode a graceful saddle, his lithe form yielding easily to accommodate the movements of the mount. Sinclair smiled to himself, gazing off across the burnished gold upon the forest; it was good, he told himself, to be getting back home.

As the red circle mounted the eastern sky, the gold gradually descended the firs until Sinclair rode a golden lane. His flesh, chilled from the night ride, warmed gratefully; the animal's muscles quivered in response and the gait quickened briskly. By noon, Sinclair computed happily, he should reach the Henderson homestead; by mid-afternoon he would be riding out of Squaw Pass to look down at last upon the miniature roofs of distant Fire Pine.

He had been uncomfortably isolated during his two weeks' absence; nothing more illuminating than his chief's official communications had reached him from Fire Pine. Not that he had worried about Derry Andrews; his partner's promise was worth face value, of course. An-

draws, though, was notoriously hot-headed; he was not given, like Sinclair, to pausing on the threshold of deeds to weigh their possible consequences.

Sinclair smiled thoughtfully as he urged the animal on through the warming sun gold. Perhaps, after all, it was just that spirit of daring in Andrews which had won him the heart of the bonny lass of MacNevor's. Andrews had, though, won Ellen MacNevor from a rival as formidably careless of consequences as himself. Sinclair recalled grimly the last encounter of the rivals several weeks before.

Only the presence of himself and the sheriff of Fire Pine had kept the guns of the two young savages in their holsters. The death threat had been passed by each of them in no uncertain terms; but Andrews, when Sinclair had pointed out to him how such a culmination of the feud would recoil upon him and the fair Ellen, had promised to keep his eyes straight ahead thereafter when passing the mad Garnett's eldest son.

It was seven thirty by his watch where the trail abruptly left the virgin timber and crossed a wide, clean-swept fire trail. It was the boundary of the Fire Pine district of the Forest Reserve, and remembering that there was a Forest Service telephone not a mile beyond, Sinclair felt a quickening of his anxiety to learn that during his absence all had gone well

with Derry Andrews and the bonny lass of MacNevor's. Derry, always a late riser after the usual Saturday night in town, would probably still be at his Sunday breakfast in their cabin on Whippet Creek. Sinclair spoke eagerly to his mount.

The telephone tree stood just off the trail in a wide circle of gigantic firs, their tremendous trunks etched brightly in the flaming sun. It was not, Sinclair told himself defensively as he turned the mount toward the telephone box on the central trunk, that he was anxious about the validity of Andrews' promise; he had thoroughly convinced Andrews, of course, that he could ill afford to risk the consequences of calling Garnett's threat. His present purpose, he insisted, was merely to tell Derry that he had remembered to bring back from the city a certain sort of a ring.

"Steady there, Jimmy!" he warned the mount, drawing up beside the telephone tree. He smiled as he opened the door of the box and took up the instrument.

A girl's voice saluted him laughingly. "Hello, Ben! You're out on the patrol bright and early this morning, I see! Want Service headquarters?"

It was good, Sinclair thought, to hear the familiar voice, and he replied with mock severity to the Fire Pine operator: "This isn't Ranger Derring, young lady! You jump at conclusions. What I want is service—not familiarity!"

"My, my!" The incorrigible Nellie Jones sighed. "What a long tail our cat has to-day. Number please, sir!"

Sinclair laughed in vast good spirits, resuming his natural voice. "Give me the Whippet Creek cabin, Nellie. I want to see if Derry Andrews is awake yet. The old scalawag probably's been out most of the——"

"Who—who is this?" Nellie interrupted breathlessly, the banter in her voice replaced by a sudden querulousness.

"Have you forgotten my voice so soon, Nellie?"

"You—you sound like Will Sinclair!" the girl exclaimed.

"No other, Nellie! Greetings—and a kiss for you! Let me have the Whippet——"

She was suddenly gone from the wire,

he knew by the sound in the receiver. With the ear of fancy he could hear the bell in his cabin ring, and could picture Derry leap from his chair at the breakfast table to storm across the room to the instrument on the wall.

"Hello!" he shouted.

It was Nellie's voice again. She had, she told him breathlessly, been unable to raise an answer from the sheriff's office. He tried to interrupt her, but could not. The posses, she said, had left Deputy Darkin behind last night, but he was probably gone to breakfast. No; there was no use ringing Whippet Creek; no one was there. That was the last place Derry Andrews would have gone after his escape. And none of the three posses had reported in; it looked as though Derry had got away, though, of course, no one had any idea as to——

By sheer superiority of lung power, Sinclair was able to stem her flow of aimless words; he demanded, his heart beating wildly, what she was talking so madly about. Derry Andrews, she told him in broken periods, had fatally shot Nels Lawson in the upper back room of the Lone Star Inn about nine o'clock the previous night. Lawson had been an innocent victim; the shot had been meant for young Garnett. Both Andrews and Garnett had been drinking; it was the old feud, of course.

Her words were running away with her again; with an impatient shout Sinclair brought her back to the beginning. Young Garnett had gone into the Lone Star first and at the bar had passed a remark about Derry's being afraid to face him. Then he went upstairs to the back room, and when Derry came in a little later some one told him what Garnett had said. Derry had drunk more than he was accustomed to handling, Nellie guessed, and he took off up the stairs to bring Garnett down and make him retract.

Nels Lawson had wanted to interfere then, a witness had told her, but the crowd wouldn't have it. When nothing was heard from upstairs after ten minutes, the crowd decided that Derry and Garnett had concluded to drink it out instead of fighting it out.

Then they heard them quarreling, and

Nels, who had been standing at the foot of the stairs, bounded to the balcony and disappeared down the hall. The others were halfway up when the shot was heard. Garnett met them in the upper hall; Nels was on the floor of the back room, dying. Derry Andrews was out completely from the liquor and a blow on the back of his head. His revolver, on the table beside his hand, was still smoking. Lawson, Garnett explained to the crowd, had jumped between them the moment Andrews fired.

There had been some talk among Andrews' friends of tar-and-feathering Garnett; they said Derry'd been trying to keep peace, and they figured Garnett was really the cause of it. Garnett had sense enough to slip away, and then the sheriff came and told the crowd to keep hands off. Andrews was coming gradually out of his stupor, and the sheriff took him downstairs and was helping him to his horse, when Andrews suddenly came to life in the fresh air, knocked the sheriff aside, and spurred off. They lost him completely in the darkness, and none of the three posses had yet reported in.

A sudden terror tightening upon his stunned heart, Sinclair glanced down the golden ribbon of trail. He pressed his eager lips to the transmitter. "Don't—don't they know which of the three trails Derry took—which way he headed?"

Nellie Jones was sobbing frankly now. "No; they don't, Will! He didn't quit the village directly; he must have ducked into a side street, for when the riders were past he managed to get back to the mill office on the river. He had several hundred dollars on deposit with the company, and he drew it from the bookkeeper, who'd been working late and hadn't heard what had happened. Then he just—dropped out of sight!"

"No marks, Nellie?"

"Nothing at all—he just disappeared! That's why they divided the posse in three—each taking one of the trails."

"How much of a head start has he, do you think, Nellie?"

"More than an hour. The sheriff came back when he found Derry had given him the slip. He stayed an hour at least at the infirmary where they'd taken Nels Lawson. No one knows just what hap-

pened there, but it's rumored that the sheriff didn't really believe Derry had done it until Nels regained consciousness for a moment. Then the sheriff made up the three posses. Derry had a good hour's start!"

His breath pausing, Sinclair dared the question that had been uppermost in his heart: "Which posse, Nellie, did the sheriff lead?"

"The one on the west trail—in case Derry was making it for Port Pine to escape on a ship. You ought to meet one of the posses—or Derry——" She caught up her words, a sudden tremor in her voice. "Where—where are you talking from?"

With a suddenly flexed forefinger, Sinclair depressed the receiver hook. No one, he told himself desperately, must know that fate had placed him in position to halt his partner's escape. A quarter of a mile beyond lay the cross trails. His own way, taking him past the Henderson homestead to pick up an affidavit requested by his chief, lay straight ahead across the divergent trails. From the other trail, leading westward to salt water, Derry Andrews would sooner or later come.

He faced, he saw grimly, a situation that held serious consequences. There could be no question in his mind which route to safety Derry had chosen; he had always said that if trouble came he would take to the coast and escape on one of the deep-water sailing ships that depart daily from the great mills at Port Pine. Replacing the receiver on the hook, he breathlessly computed the hours Andrews had traveled. He could not possibly have reached the cross trails.

He faced, Sinclair saw, a tremendous division of allegiance. It was squarely up to him to choose between his duty and Derry. Should it ever be learned that he had ridden willfully past the cross trails, permitting a fugitive to escape—Such a deed, like all others of blind impulse, would recoil upon him. For every action, the law of balance held; there must be an equal reaction. Could he elude that law, permit Derry's escape, without bringing upon himself a recoiling retribution? No one knew of his whereabouts; he had cut off Nellie's question.

CHAPTER II.

NO WAY OUT.

THE telephone swayed perilously in Sinclair's hands, and the bold hope evaporated from his heart. It was, he saw, the workings of the inexorable law; if he chose for Derry he must pay the price. His whereabouts could be placed precisely; Nellie's question had been superfluous. By the light on her switchboard she knew.

Revulsion sweeping him, he swiftly replaced the instrument in the box as the bell summoned him imperiously. Wheeling impulsively back to the trail, he gave spur to the mount, and the calling of the bell was gradually lost behind him. Derry or his duty, he repeated desperately as he urged the straining mount on. Down the sun-burnished lane ahead, the cross trails widened into view.

He must, he saw, choose at once. In his mind's eye he could picture Derry Andrews, off somewhere to the left, spurring down upon the cross trails toward the salt water and escape. Again Sinclair computed the hours Derry had traveled; it was, plainly, within his power to intercept the fugitive's flight.

He drew up where the two golden lanes crossed and faced the divergent ways. His loyalty to Derry bade him continue on upon his original direction and purpose, leaving the westward trail clear. Derry had powerful friends in Port Pine; doubtless they had already heard of the occurrence, divined Derry's mode of escape, and had made arrangements for his disappearance once he won into the coast country. His heart rose rebelliously at the thought of interfering. Some day in a foreign land, perhaps, the bonny lass of MacNevor's would join Derry. And perhaps even Sinclair—

He stemmed the tempting flood of desire from his heart. He was, he reminded himself grimly, a sworn officer of the law who had been duly apprised of a crime and the possibility that the culprit was near by. To ride on, leaving the westward trail open to the fugitive, was treachery to his oath and infidelity to his trust. These things were not mere hollow words to Sinclair; their meaning burdened heavily upon his soul.

He faced, he recognized, the inescapable. The law of recoil was in full play upon him. He could not elude it; whichever way he chose, the course chosen would react upon him. To serve his duty was to betray his partner; to serve Derry was to defile the confidence intrusted to his honor.

His heart in panic as his reason bade him choose duty, he sought blindly for some middle course, some manner of deflecting the force of the certain recoil. He must make his decision at once; at any moment, he realized desperately, Derry's mount might spur into view about the distant bend. There must be, the blind need in his heart insisted against his reason, some way to cheat the recoil. If only his head were clear, his pulse calm, he would surely discover some course of action permitting him to serve Derry and yet escape the unspeakable consequences.

His breath halting upon his lips, he started to a sudden sound of distant hurrying hoofs. They came, he made out in commingled terror and relief, neither from the way he faced nor from the westward trail; somewhere in between, within the shadowed depths of the firs that separated the divergent ways, a rider was spurring toward him at the cross trails. He had, Sinclair knew, waited too long; his procrastination was recoiling upon him. If it were Derry!

He knew overwhelming revolt to the roots of his being as his hand touched the handle of his holstered revolver. An instant later, down a dim forest aisle, the approaching rider thundered heavily into view. The animal, he made out, was not Derry's. It was a great draft animal, a sorrel, with tremendous shoulders and shaggy fetlocks, ridden wildly by a frail boy of perhaps ten or twelve.

At the sight of Sinclair standing in the cross trails the rider called out hysterically and drummed the winded animal's sides with his bare heels. In his overwhelming relief, Sinclair laughed aloud at the inciting spectacle of the diminutive rider upon so enormous a steed.

On to the trail the ill-mated pair came, and the boy drew up beside Sinclair. Inarticulate with excitement, he fought desperately for voice, his spindle legs rising

and falling ludicrously with the mighty respirations of the mount's tremendous sides.

"Are—are you the ranger—we passed last night?" he panted, his eyes searching Sinclair's face with a pitiful intentness. "He told us—he'd be passing along this way this——"

"No; I'm not a ranger. I'm Sinclair, deputy sheriff of——"

"Deputy sheriff?" the boy echoed in explosive enthusiasm, tears of relief starting from his eyes. "God sent you, deputy! There's a crazy man—back at the ranger cabin yonder—not two miles! You come! He's trying to kill——"

It was, Sinclair saw eagerly with hot blood abruptly coursing through his veins, his opportunity, the thing he had sought, a worthy justification for leaving the cross trails unguarded. He could serve Derry without arousing a recoil against himself. The law of reaction, to which he had long done humble homage, was not inviolable; one could circumvent its workings if one but had the luck and wit.

He abandoned these lightning flashes of thought and peered gratefully at the hard-breathing boy. "What's happened, lad? Speak out!"

"We're newcomers, deputy—heading to settle in Fire Pine valley. Me and the mother and the children—we stopped for the night at a ranger cabin yonder in the timber. A ranger we met yesterday evening told us where it was——"

"Never mind details!" Sinclair cut in impatiently. "What happened?"

"This morning we had a passer-by for breakfast, and just as we was sitting down to eat a man rode up and comes in. Instantly he sees us he's gone crazy mad—shooting into the midst of us with his revolver. The other man stands him off, and I get the family into the stores closet and barred the door on the inside. They're shooting like wild, and through a crack in the closet door I see that the crazy one has backed the other into the next room beyond where we was eating.

"I saw the first man get a bullet just as he dived into the next room; he was shot right here, through the chest. I figured it was all over with us—the crazy one'd be turning our way, and my rifle was stand-

ing in the corner of the room where I couldn't get at it. Through the door of the next room I could see the one that's shot drop to the floor and crawl out of sight. The room's being used to store a lot of supplies and there's big piles of boxes. The crazy one follows, and the other wings him. He jumps behind a pile of boxes, and there they are shooting it out.

"Thinking it's maybe safe, I sneaked out of the closet and tried to reach the telephone. But the crazy one spots me and fires. I couldn't reach my rifle, either, so I breaks for the door and Lochinvar here, and we rides——"

"Shhh!" Sinclair abruptly warned, startling the boy to quick palor.

From a distance there came a sudden subdued drumming. It was either thunder off among the eastern mountains or hoofbeats. A shudder ran through him; if Derry Andrews' mount—the little tan gelding—should suddenly wheel into view about the bend!

Sinclair snatched up the bridle. "Come on, lad!" he shouted, waited for the diminutive rider to maneuver his ponderous steed, and led the way at top speed into the timber whence the boy had come. In a moment the warming sunlight was lost; the way led along a narrow aisle through lush woodland.

It was a mad flight, the columns of mighty firs racing rearward dizzily. Behind him, the heavy-hoofed sorrel was making hard work of maintaining the pace; above its thunderous progress the voice of the boy urged it shrilly. A sense of triumph stirred Sinclair mightily; the cross trails were open for Derry to sweep on into the coast country and the haven of salt water. And no recoiling consequences awaited Sinclair; he had succeeded in defeating the law of balance.

"Just around the next bend!" he presently heard the boy shout to him from behind.

From a distance, even against the lazy morning breeze, Sinclair caught the sound of shots. Bearing down upon the big bend, he eased the pace for the boy to bring up abreast of him upon the widening way. They passed a saddle animal grazing at the trail side.

"Not far now!" the boy shouted breath-

lessly. "That's the crazy one's horse straying off! Just around the bend's the cabin!"

Swinging about the bend, they drove down upon a full view of the ranger cabin in a clearing among the firs. Sinclair started violently then, leaning forward in the saddle. He suppressed an involuntary exclamation that leaped in his throat. He could feel the terror dawning in his eyes as he made out a single animal standing at the cabin hitching rail. His surging sense of triumph was checked in midcareer; he raised his arm to brush the fearful hallucination from his eyes.

It had not, he saw, been a trick of his vision; the lone saddle animal, wincing as a fusillade of shots sounded, stood at the rail. Recoiling, Sinclair dropped back into the saddle and gave spur. He had been a fool, he made out, to hope that he could cheat the law of recoil. It was, plainly, in full operation upon him; his effort to escape it had but compounded its force. Unmistakably the little tan gelding at the hitching rail of the cabin was Derry Andrews'.

CHAPTER III.

A DESPERATE ENCOUNTER.

DRAWING rein before the cabin, Sinclair vaulted from the saddle while the mount was yet upreared. He turned upon the boy who vigorously checked the thunderous charge of his tremendous steed and swung to the ground.

"They're in the room to the left!" the youngster shouted above a sudden clatter of revolver shots. "Look out as you go into the cabin, deputy; the crazy's one's behind a pile of boxes at the far end of the second room, facing the door. He'll pot-shot you, sure!"

Sinclair unlatched the flap of his saddle holster, withdrew his rifle, and handed it to the boy. "You stand outside here. Don't get yourself in the line of the fire. Use this in case he gets by—or drops me. We can't get your folks out until we've disarmed him. Can you use a rifle?"

The boy's slender hands caressed the weapon. "Just let him start this way, and he'll see if I can!"

"Be sure of your man!" Sinclair warned. "Don't fire on the other!"

"I know the crazy one! But you watch out as you go in the front door!"

"I know the cabin," Sinclair replied, drawing his revolver.

A bitter fusillade broke within the structure, and he leaped to the door. The two men in the second room, he knew, were expecting him; they could not have missed hearing the horses come up. Kicking open the door he saw an upturned table in the center of the main room. Standing upon its edge, the heavy table top would prove an adequate shield. Sinclair launched himself over the threshold, across the room, and dropped behind the upended table just as a whining ball thudded into the stout planks.

In the adjoining room shot after shot followed, but the table was not struck again. The two men, he understood, were exchanging fire between them. Each, he reasoned, must be securely barricaded to have maintained this long the revolver duel across so small a space.

He raised his head cautiously to glance about the edge of his barrier, and instantly a bullet passed over his head. Dropping back to his knees he found a meager crack between two of the table boards through which he could command a restricted view of the open door of the room beyond.

Within, he saw, it was dim with heavy powder smoke. Even as he sought to penetrate the haze, he saw two winking flashes, heard the balls sing, and a muffled outcry of pain. It was Derry Andrews' voice. Thrusting his shoulder against the table, Sinclair forced it inch by inch across the floor toward the open doorway. Again two shots, in rapid succession, imbedded viciously in the stout planks that sheltered him.

He pressed his eyes to the crack again and made out through the veil of smoke a high pile of boxes directly facing the door. It was, he knew, the attacker's stronghold; Derry himself must be somewhere off to the right, out of his range of vision.

He faced, Sinclair recognized, a hopeless issue. Though he saved Derry from the attacker's bullets, it was only to make him prisoner for the hangman's noose. There was, plainly, no escape from recoil. This time he must face the law of

balance squarely; to attempt to cheat it, he had discovered, was but to increase its force.

The man whom the excited boy had taken for a madman was, his reason told him, nothing more than some settler who had learned of the crime and of the reward which Nels Lawson's influential relatives had doubtless offered for his slayer. The man was standing off Sinclair, either fearing him to be one of Andrews' friends, or recognizing in him a possible claimant for a portion of the reward which he was not inclined to share.

He faced, Sinclair saw desperately, the very same issue he had at the cross trails, and the same consequences. He started violently as through the meager space between the planks he saw the peak of a hat appear cautiously about the left edge of the attacker's barricade of high-piled boxes. The hat continued to emerge, then a white strip of forehead, and two eyes.

It was, Sinclair recognized, the show-down. The attacker had hitherto been posted several yards to the left of the box ends, and though Sinclair was denied a view of his partner's shelter, the conviction suddenly fixed upon him that the other's new position yielded a strategic command of Derry's hiding place. Obviously Derry had not caught sight of the hat and forehead, for utter silence hung upon the room.

A hand bearing a revolver slipped swiftly into view beside the eyes, and Sinclair's own battle was done. With the tremendous upsurge of instinctive desire to save his partner, other needs were engulfed and swept futilely along the unchecked torrent. He rose from behind his shelter, threw his weapon down upon the mark, and laughing savagely pulled the trigger.

The aiming eyes drew back, and Sinclair's shot tore into the box ends directly opposite the point where the revolver had been. Abandoned to his madness, all thought of consequences forsaken, he leaped the table, and drove through the doorway. Toward the boxes he flung himself, and heard Derry's faint cry of warning. A shot thundered overhead just as he dropped to the floor at the base of the attacker's barricade.

He was, Sinclair recognized, committed wholly to madness now; he demanded the attacker's surrender and was answered by a surly oath. Over his shoulder he made out through the acrid powder smoke a second pile of boxes; behind it, he knew, his partner crouched. Sinclair laughed savagely; he had left his old mode of life wherein he had carefully weighed every action by its possible reaction. Now he was beyond the pale, daring life to recoil upon him, as rash as the rash Derry had been the night before when he had mounted the inn stairs to take young Garnett to task.

Yet he might still be able, a sudden return of boldness told him, to cheat the law of recoil. His failure to halt Derry's escape must appear accidental; if he must wound or kill the attacker, it must seem wholly impersonal and in no wise related to his partnership with Derry or his hatred of young Garnett. While he grappled with the attacker, Derry could escape; the boy outside would not interfere. There could be in that, he saw with quickening hope, no chance of recoil; it was his duty to subdue the man who threatened the life of his prisoner, and if the prisoner escaped while he was so engaged, no one could charge him with personal motives.

"Look out, Will!" Derry's own voice broke the ominous stillness, and Sinclair whipped about. "He's above you, Will!"

Even as Sinclair's eyes shot overhead to the crest of the barricade, he saw one of the heavy boxes directly above slip from place and fall. He sought to spring clear, but his crouched position denied him sufficient agility. A rigid corner of the heavy box slashed the back of his head and struck his right shoulder a crushing blow. Crumpling beneath it, he collapsed to the floor.

He wrestled with black unconsciousness and struggled to free his right arm, pinned beneath the tremendous weight of the box. It was filled, he saw by the tag on the end directly before his misted eyes, with brass fittings for the new pumping plant about to be installed on Cat Creek by the Forest Service. His arm, plainly, was broken; driving against the box with his shoulder, he raised it and drew his arm free. His fingers were

crushed, crimson, having been jammed cruelly between the box and the revolver his hand had held.

His pain-numbed faculties reviving beneath the urge of his will, he won back to his knees in time to see Derry Andrews staggering toward him from the farther pile of boxes. His partner, he saw incredibly, was scarcely able to maintain his balance. His right trouser leg was dyed crimson, and his left shoulder was lowered like a cripple's, the arm dangling aimlessly at his side. In Andrews' right hand, grasped by the barrel, was a revolver. His manner of holding the weapon burned an indelible significance upon Sinclair. Derry had used his last cartridge.

Just around the end of the barricade he caught sound of heavy panting, like a starved animal imminent upon engaging a wounded prey. He must, Sinclair realized, retrieve his revolver from beneath the box; the moment the attacker caught sight of Derry in the open he would fire. Sinclair was grasping the box to lift it from his weapon, when a sudden exclamation told him that the other had seen his approaching partner.

Flinging himself to his feet he drove blindly about the end of the barricade. A hat, forehead, eyes, and a flaming gun greeted him. He took the ball solidly in the muscles at the left edge of his stomach and bore on without pause. Blinded by the powder smoke from the shot, he collided with the man just as the latter was rising from his knees to meet the unexpected attack.

The force of Sinclair's charge, as he grappled the other, carried the man backward and down. In a long, running fall, Sinclair on top of him, the other's head struck the floor with an echoing racket. Laughing savagely, Sinclair's fingers sought for the throat; unerringly, though his smarting eyes would not open, he found the jugular. But he did not set his rigid thumb in the death grip. The form beneath him had suddenly gone limp.

Rising blindly to his knees Sinclair rubbed his burning eyes. From behind him he could hear Derry's limping approach. There was no sound from the form on the floor. Derry could escape

now, and no one would know that it had not been by accident while Sinclair was engaging the attacker. Nor could he be charged with personal motives; his struggle with the other could in no wise savor of his known preference in the feud between Andrews and young Garnett.

The pain of his eyes forgotten in his sudden need to learn if the man still lived, he felt for the recumbent form beside him. The other's heart, his exploring fingers found, still beat. Triumph filled him; the situation was perfect. There was no hint of anything personal in the battle which would serve as the cause of Derry's escape. He had found a flaw in the law of balance. His vision clearing, he leaned breathlessly forward to peer at the face lying beyond. Abruptly then he cried out, recoiling sharply. The colorless face on the floor was that of young Garnett himself.

CHAPTER IV.

STRONG FOR IT.

RISING staggeringly to his feet, Sinclair felt the utter finality of his defeat. Again his effort to circumvent the law of balance had but brought upon him greater retribution. Beneath Garnett's tousled head a pool of red widened. Sinclair called through the open doorway. An instant later the racing patter of bare feet heralded the boy.

"Gosh, deputy, I thought you was all dead by this time! You—you got the crazy one, eh?"

"He needs attending to and bandaging," Sinclair replied, suppressing a grim reflex. "My hand's bashed up, and I can't do the job. Bring your mother, and some cloth for bandages."

The boy flung out of the room, leaving Sinclair's rifle against the wall. Sinclair turned to face Andrews, who leaned wearily, palid of countenance, against the high pile of boxes. "Will, you look like a ghost!" Andrews exclaimed.

Sinclair nodded. "Come on into the next room, Derry. We—we've got to face it now! The woman'll fix Garnett. We can't help here."

In the main room a portly woman, two children clinging to her skirts, was stooped over a bundle of clothing in which

she was rummaging. The boy hastened in from outside with a wooden pail of water. His mother, selecting several lengths of white cloth, passed Sinclair and Andrews with a frightened nod and hastened with the two clinging children into the next room. Pail in hand, the boy followed. Sinclair forced the table aside and closed the door.

Leaning wearily back against the door, he peered across the room at his partner, grotesquely twisted by his injury. Wrapping the crushed hand in his handkerchief, he laid it across his left arm. "We're going to wait for the posse."

Andrews laughed derisively, glancing over his shoulder through the open doorway swimming with golden sunlight. From the hitching rail his little tan gelding whinnied. Andrews shook his head. "Not me, Will! Nobody's going to frame me for a hanging or a life stretch in Duaroad! It's only ten miles to——"

"Ten miles, Derry?" Sinclair interrupted bitterly, crossing to his partner. "You couldn't get away with it if it were only one mile!"

"I tell you the *Alice May* sails from Port Pine on the two-o'clock-tide! She's lying in the channel now; O'Dare will arrange a fast launch——"

"You and I are through with running away, Derry! You can't escape consequences. Now we're going to stand and face it!"

Laughing harshly, Derry glanced narrowly at him. "This is no time for your theories, Will! I'm going——"

Sinclair stepped decisively between him and the door. "You're my prisoner, Derry. You stay!"

Wheeling grotesquely to face him, Andrews' lips trembled. "I tell you I'm moving out of here—now! The posse's none too far behind by this time! They'll see where I left the trail to cross-cut past here! Nobody's going to get a chance to frame me, I tell you, Will! I had no intention of killing Nels; he must have stepped right into the shot! I don't even remember——"

"How did it happen, Derry?" Sinclair demanded.

"Garnett and I had it out in the back room—peacefully at first. I wanted to keep my promise to you! But Garnett

wouldn't have it that way, and he warned me to draw."

Andrews smiled bitterly. "A gentleman's warning, Will—and him with his hand already on his gun! My head was spinning from the stuff I'd drunk, but I drew and threw down on him—just as Nels kicked open the door. The door struck me on the back of the head, and I pitched forward. Nels must have jumped in front of me then; I don't see how else it could have happened——" Andrews halted impatiently. "I'm wasting time, Will. You're unarmed—and hurt. In Heaven's name don't force me to——"

"You're not going, Derry! You've stored up enough recoil for yourself already."

"I don't believe in such rot, Will. If a man's got his wits he can get away."

"We're going to stand and face it! I've got five thousand dollars, Derry. We'll bring in the best lawyer in the State to fight your case. Don't you see that running away won't do any good? I tried it, and I found you and Garnett! Look at the mess!"

"I don't believe in your crazy theories, Will! There's no such thing as recoil. Step aside, Will! I'm going!"

Suddenly Sinclair turned from the terror in Andrews' eyes. Rigid in his tracks he harked to the soft drumming sound brought through the open door upon the wings of the gentle breeze. It was the sound of riders—many of them. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw Derry dart toward the door, and he threw himself headlong in his path. Grappling, they reeled together toward the corner of the room. Leaning there, Sinclair abruptly saw the boy's rifle.

Flinging Andrews aside he grasped the weapon and covered his partner. Derry's second charge toward the door brought up violently before the rifle barrel.

"Back, Derry!" Sinclair cried. "Only fools run away, and you and I've been fools long enough!"

The drumming of hoofs grew steadily. Retreating before the rifle, Andrews cried: "Are you going to let me hang—for a crazy theory? I tell you I can get away—even now!"

"We're going to take our recoil now!"

Contempt flaming in his eyes, Andrews laughed madly. "Judas! You got the upper hand—with a hangman's noose in it! Go ahead—hang me for your crazy theory!"

On and on the hoofs came; it was a matter of minutes now. Sinclair braced himself grimly.

"Sit down over there, Derry!" he whispered breathlessly, as though the riders were already within hearing. "They mustn't find us this way—me holding you at the point of a rifle!"

"Judas!" Andrews cried hysterically, and flung himself into a chair. "Letting your own partner hang!"

Horses thundered into the clearing and drew up. There were, Sinclair saw through the doorway, fully twenty of them. Sheriff Dunn and two others dismounted. Setting the rifle against a chair, Sinclair impulsively stepped forward to take a stand between his partner and the surprised officer who leaped to the threshold.

"Sinclair!" Sheriff Dunn exclaimed. "And Derry Andrews, too! Good work, Will!"

Andrews' derisive laughter drove a crimson tide to Sinclair's face as he stepped impulsively forward. "You got it wrong, Jim! I didn't capture, Derry. He decided to stand and face it—of his own free will! That—that ought to help, hadn't it?"

Dunn peered quizzically at him. "I don't see how, Will. What are you figuring on?"

He must, Sinclair told himself, face the consequences squarely. "Derry's my partner, Jim—and I won't see any rail-roading! It wasn't murder; it was an accident!"

Dunn shook his head. "It was murder, Will. Nels Lawson regained consciousness before he died. I questioned him."

Behind him Sinclair heard Derry Andrews rise to his feet. Bracing himself for the recoil, Sinclair demanded: "What—what did Nels say?"

Dunn glanced about the room. "We've kept this a secret, Will—for obvious reasons. But I guess all of us here are safe. Nels said that as he opened the door, kicking it full strength, he knocked Derry

senseless, and his gun dropped from his hand. As Derry pitched forward, Garnett snatched up Derry's gun and was going to finish him then. Nels grappled with him and in the tussle Garnett killed Nels with Derry's gun."

The hair of his head bristling, Sinclair felt himself rocking upon his feet. "Gar—Garnett killed —"

Dunn nodded. "But, mind you, Garnett's got away, and we're not letting the facts out until we've got him. We thought we were following his tracks instead of Derry's, but apparently——"

Laughing madly, Sinclair pointed to the closed door of the next room. "Take—take a look in there, Jim!"

Dunn, followed by the two riders, crossed the room, flung open the door, and disappeared within. His pulse deafening him, Sinclair turned upon his partner. Leaning against the back of the chair, his eyes staring, Derry Andrews raised his hand in a hopeless gesture. He essayed to speak, but it was a moment before his voice came.

"Garnett did it, Will, and I might never have known! I might have been running away forever—from nothing! Lord, if I hadn't met you, and had got to Port Pine and sailed on a deep-water lugger!"

The wine of incredible victory intoxicating him, Sinclair bore unsteadily down upon his partner. They faced each other breathlessly, each overwhelmingly weary. With tremendous conviction in his expression, Andrews nodded to the thought reflected in Sinclair's wistful eyes.

"Will, if—if this is what you call the law of recoil—I'm strong for it!"

Making it Certain

WILLIE was under orders never to go swimming. His mother meant to see that he obeyed. One day she became suspicious.

"Willie, your clothes are wet," she said. "You have been in the water."

"Yes, mother. I went in to save Charlie Hanks."

"My noble darling! Did you jump in after him?"

"No, mother. I jumped in first, so as to be there when he fell in."



Full Speed- Backward!

By
E. Whitman Chambers ~

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

PLENTY OF NERVE.

SUDDENLY Miss Kate Pelton, private secretary to Anthony Kirk, of the Kirk Steam Motor Cars, Incorporated, became conscious that she was not alone in her palatially appointed office. She was made aware of this fact by the odor of a Turkish cigarette, which suddenly assailed her delicate nostrils.

Some one had entered her office without the formality of knocking. Some one had quietly seated himself behind her and was at that moment exuding clouds of smoke. Miss Pelton abhorred Turkish cigarettes. Likewise she was loftily conscious of her exalted position as private secretary to the president of the Kirk Steam Motor Cars, Incorporated, having but recently been promoted from the rank of stenographer for a grocery concern.

Miss Pelton's white brow corrugated unbecomingly. Drawing her comely face into the most scathing expression she could muster, she whirled suddenly in her chair. "Well?" she snapped.

The young man who sat on the chair behind her raised his smart straw hat deferentially and politely returned it to his head. A ready smile expanded, revealing straight white teeth. His gray eyes were whimsically teasing. "Quite well, thank you. And you?"

Miss Pelton disdained an answer to his question. Why was it that every good-looking young man who came into the office tried to act smart? She was sick of vaudeville repartee. "Aren't you in the habit of knocking before you enter a room?" Miss Pelton asked scathingly.

"I heard you typing. I didn't want to disturb your efforts. It's so seldom that an office girl works nowadays."

An office girl! The idea! Miss Pelton wanted to explode. Knowing that was exactly what he expected her to do, she restrained the impulse with difficulty. "Who do you wish to see?" she asked pointedly, if ungrammatically.

"Mr. Anthony Kirk."

"He is very busy."

"But he can't be too busy to see me. I represent the Pacific Advertising and Publicity Agency. Give him a buzz and tell him I'm here. Mr. Canfield is the name. Pacific Advertising and Publicity. Got it?"

"Does he expect you?"

The broad shoulders in their perfectly fitted gray tweed shrugged nonchalantly. "Possibly I will surprise him. Who knows? Now will you be a good girl and give him a buzz? Pacific Advertising and Publicity, you know, Mr. Canfield."

Miss Pelton grasped the telephone resignedly, pressed a button on the box. Canfield rose, strode idly to the open window, and tossed out the butt of his ciga-

rette, quite obvious to the throng of passers-by below.

"Mr. Canfield to see you, Mr. Kirk," Miss Pelton said into the transmitter. "He represents the Pacific Advertising and Publicity Agency."

There was a brief pause, during which Canfield removed his straw hat, twirled it six times, and returned it to his head.

"Very well. I'll tell him." The girl hung up the receiver and turned to Canfield with the triumphant flourish of one whose opinions have been vindicated by the highest tribunal. "Mr. Kirk says that he has never heard of you. He has never heard of the Pacific Advertising Agency. He is not ready to hire a publicity agent and is too busy to waste time talking to you."

Canfield's shoulders shrugged again. Miss Pelton grudgingly admitted to herself that his nonchalance was admirable. Nice-looking boy, too! She liked his eyes. They were gray and cool. He seemed so—so masterful.

"So that's the greeting he gives my overture of peace." Canfield smiled. "Well, would you mind giving him another buzz and telling him a representative of the San Francisco Publicity Agency is awaiting his pleasure. The representative's name is Brown. Got it? San Francisco Publicity Agency. Brown."

Miss Pelton regarded him suspiciously. "Just exactly what are you trying to get away with?"

"Murder, girlie. And incidentally a fat job. Be a sport and give him a buzz."

Miss Pelton, acting more on impulse than common sense, gave her employer the requested buzz and made the requested announcement.

"He doesn't care to see you," she told Canfield at last.

"Oh, very well."

Miss Pelton closed the interview by deliberately turning back to her typing. She typed six words and was conscious of another cloud of Turkish cigarette smoke. She wheeled angrily. "Have you taken up your residence in my office?" she asked.

"Only temporarily," Canfield returned, puffing grandiosely. "Say, would you mind telling the boss that Mr. Jones, of the Bay Cities Advertising Agency, re-

quests an immediate audience? Bay Cities Advertising. Mr. Jones. Got it?"

Miss Pelton's chin went up a fraction of an inch higher.

"Say, what are you trying to pull around here? A Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? Who is this Bay Cities Advertising Agency? And the San Francisco Publicity Agency? And the Pacific Advertising Agency?"

"They—are I," Canfield returned smilingly. "No; that's wrong. They is I. No; they are me. No; that's not right. They, meaning the agencies, are us, meaning me. Got it?"

"And who, may I be so bold to ask, are you?"

"Ah, now you're saying words! I am Jack Canfield, former star reporter for the San Francisco *Bulletin* and at present a twenty-two karat, all-wool-and-a-yard-wide publicity agent. The best in San Francisco. Nay; the best in the West! Yes; that's it. The best in the West. Good slogan, isn't it?"

"Wonderful," Miss Pelton returned sarcastically. "But will you please throw that cigarette away? I abhor Turkish cigarettes."

"With pleasure." He flipped it out of the window. "Haven't got a domestic cigarette tucked away in your desk, have you?"

Miss Pelton jerked open the top drawer of her desk and pulled out a package of cigarettes. "Here! If you must smoke, take one of these."

"Thanks."

Canfield helped himself to a cigarette, lighted it, and inhaled deeply. "Now be good enough to relay that message for me. Bay Cities Advertising. Mr. Jones. Got it?"

With a sigh of resignation, Miss Pelton grasped the telephone and pressed the proper button. "Mr. Jones of the Bay Cities Advertising Agency would like to see you, Mr. Kirk."

Canfield heard a series of crackling sounds, much the same as his radio set emitted on occasions.

"I don't know," Miss Pelton answered the crackling sounds. "No; I don't know why in the Sam Hill all these press agents are hounding you. I'm afraid I'm not big enough to throw the next one out of the

window. Very well, Mr. Kirk. I'll tell him."

She turned back to Canfield. "Mr. Kirk told me to tell you to clear out of here and not come back. Incidentally, he told me to throw the next press agent that came in here out of the window."

Canfield grinned. "Here I am. You can start work on me."

Miss Pelton turned resolutely back to her typing. "I wish you'd leave," she said, over her shoulder. "If you stay around here much longer, you'll make me lose my position."

"If you do, I'll get you a better one," Canfield came back magnanimously, seating himself again. "I'm going to need a first-class stenographer myself—when I get an office—and a job."

The disdainful click of typewriter keys answered his offer. The sound continued for several minutes, broken at times by the scratching of an eraser. Miss Pelton was not in her best form that day. Besides, she hated to have a man's eyes boring into the small of her back.

"Say, you haven't got another cigarette, have you?" Canfield inquired at last. "Hate to bother you, but I haven't anything but these Turkish things you don't like. I'll buy you a whole carton when I land this job. I'll buy you a dozen cartons."

Scornfully silent, Miss Pelton passed the cigarettes. Canfield lighted one, looked at his watch, snapped the case shut so loudly that Miss Pelton jumped, and then started to whistle "The Madhouse Blues." While he may have been a good press agent, Canfield could never have impressed a booking agent with his abilities as a whistler.

Miss Pelton rebelled after four bars. "Be yourself, Mr. Canfield. This isn't a vaudeville stage. If you must whistle, go out in the street."

"Hub—what? Don't you like that number? Well, listen to this one. It's the latest: 'Mamma Loves Papa on Pay Day.'"

This number was cut off in the middle of the second measure by a notebook which caromed off Mr. Canfield's shoulder.

"You'll have to do better than that if you want to play on my team." He

grinned at the flashing-eyed sprite who confronted him. "Besides, it's not lady-like to throw books at gentlemen."

"Where did you get the erroneous idea you were a gentleman?" Miss Pelton inquired indignantly.

Canfield opened his eyes admiringly. "Say, you're pretty when you're mad! Snappy little girl, I'd say. Biggest eyes I've looked at in a long while. Most of your color's natural, too, isn't it? Quite some little girl. Say, I've got a couple of passes——"

"Shut up!"

"Oh, all right. I'm shut."

Miss Pelton returned to her typewriter, made a mistake in the first word she wrote, and tore out the page furiously. An almost inaudible chuckle came from behind her chair. She wanted to throw something else at him, the typewriter maybe, and yet hated to admit that she was ruffled. Very calmly and deliberately she placed a new sheet of paper in the machine. She was glad her bobbed black hair effectually concealed her ears. She knew that they were very red.

Miss Pelton had typed half a page before she was again interrupted.

"Hate to bother you, but would you mind telling the boss that Mr. Canfield, of the Pacific Advertising and Publicity Agency, is back again and has got to see him immediately?"

"He told you once that he didn't want to see you," Miss Pelton reminded him obdurately.

"Ah, but then I didn't have him wondering about the reason for this sudden shower of press agents. Get my point? He's curious. He wants to know how we learned that he was on the market for a good agent."

"How do you know he is?"

"He's bound to be. Can't help himself, once he talks to me. Now be a sport and give him a buzz. Mr. Canfield. Pacific Advertising and Publicity. Got it?"

"I had it the first time," Miss Pelton returned wearily, and wearily she called her employer again. It was with patent relief that she soon turned back to Canfield. "He'll see you this time, thank Heaven."

"Don't thank Heaven—thank me." Canfield grinned. He strode decisively

toward the door. "Pray for me, sister," he called over his shoulder, and walked into the next office.

CHAPTER II.

BIG-LEAGUE STUFF.

KIRK, of the Kirk Steam Motor Cars, Incorporated, was a tall, slender individual of an indeterminate age. His eyes were colorless, his face was colorless, and, Canfield suspected, his personality was also colorless. He sat behind his desk, regarding his visitor with unveiled animosity.

"What do you want?" he asked in a voice that seemed to rumble up from his shoe tops.

"Canfield is my name, Mr. Kirk," the press agent began breezily.

"I didn't ask your name. I asked you what you wanted."

"I want the position of publicity manager for the Kirk Steam Motor Cars, Incorporated," came back Canfield, no wise abashed by the other's lack of cordiality.

"How do you know we want a publicity manager?"

"You've got to have one. Can't do business without one. According to the secretary of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, you are in the market for a factory site in this city. You plan to put out a new type of steam automobile that will make all other steam cars look like the original horseless carriage. You have already constructed four of the new cars and are now trying them out. According to reports, they are practically perfect.

"You are going to manufacture the cars in San Francisco, and you are going to sell them all over the country," he went on. "You've got to advertise to do that, and you've got to have publicity in the newspapers. Preliminary to doing that, you've probably got to put the stock in your company on the market. You've got to create enough interest in the Kirk steam car to make a demand for the stock. And I'm the man to create that interest. Every city editor in the bay district is a personal friend of mine. I've worked for them all."

"And been fired by them all, I suppose." Kirk put in encouragingly.

"Been fired by only one. That leaves eight city editors in Oakland and San Francisco that are ready to eat up anything I give them. You've got a campaign in front of you, Mr. Kirk. You need somebody to help you put it over who knows the city and who knows the newspapers and who knows the publicity game. And I'm convinced that I'm the man for the job."

"Who were these other press agents who were besieging my office?" Kirk asked suspiciously.

"Rivals of mine, every last one of them. I heard about your company first, and they followed me here, trying to get the job away from me. When you were too busy to see me the first time I called, I went out and attended to some business and came back later. I knew you wouldn't want any of those other men. They didn't impress you greatly, did they, Mr. Kirk?"

"I didn't see 'em," Kirk snapped. "And I wouldn't have seen you if I hadn't wanted to find out the reason for all this bombardment of my office. Anyway, I'm not ready to shoot on any of my publicity just yet. Be a month before I'm ready to go ahead."

"Perfectly all right," Canfield put in easily. "I'm tied up hand and foot with a dozen contracts myself right now. Keeps me going night and day. I haven't had over four hours' sleep any night for the past two weeks." He neglected to add that an epidemic of card parties had been responsible for his lack of slumber.

"Come back in a month and we'll talk business," Kirk decided. "No use crossing bridges. I won't be ready to shoot until the first."

"There's no time like the present, Mr. Kirk. I've had offers to start work next month on four different campaigns. If you wait, I'll probably be tied up with somebody else."

Kirk's colorless eyes regarded his visitor vindictively, with more than a trace of suspicion. "What salary do you expect?" he rumbled.

"One fifty a week." Canfield's voice did not even tremble.

"It's three times too much."

Canfield shrugged with the same nonchalance that had caught Miss Pelton's

eye. "You can get a press agent for twenty a week, Mr. Kirk. And if he puts over twenty dollars' worth of publicity a week, he'll be lucky. Or you can get me for one hundred and fifty. And if I don't put over a thousand dollars' worth of copy every week, I'll quit the job. You get what you pay for in this game, Mr. Kirk. If you pay bush-league wages, you'll get bush-league press agents. If you pay big-league wages, you'll get big-league performers, like myself. What 'Babe' Ruth is to baseball. I am to the publicity——"

"Cut it! You're hired! If you can blow my horn half as well as you can blow your own, you'll earn your hundred and fifty a week. Now get out and come back on the first of the month prepared to go to work."

"I get the job?" Canfield was unable to conceal his eagerness.

"You get the job," Kirk rumbled. "And if you don't get out of here in a hurry, you'll get the air."

"Thanks, Mr. Kirk. Good morning, sir." Canfield had forgotten that it was then nearly four in the afternoon.

He found Miss Pelton pounding the keys in the outer office. She did not look up as he closed the door. Funny! Wasn't she going to ask him if he got the job? Queer woman! No curiosity!

"H'm, I wonder if I could trouble you for another one of those cigarettes?" Canfield began at last. "I'd smoke one of my own, only I know they bother you."

"You're going out, aren't you?" flashed Miss Pelton, without stopping her typing. She made four mistakes in the next line, but she did not stop to erase them. "If you're going out, why bother about me?"

"I just wanted to cultivate the taste for your brand," Canfield came back promptly. "We're going to be together quite a bit from now on."

"Well, you can't make me mad. I'm not proud."

Miss Pelton made three more mistakes. The page was now hopelessly ruined. However, she did not stop her feverish bombardment of the keys. She could start a new page after this obnoxious press agent had gone.

"I've still got those two passes——" Canfield began.

"You have my permission to keep them. Also to hurry along and sell your papers. I have to work to earn my living."

Canfield chuckled. "You can't earn much of a living by typing 'yours sincerely' on the same sheet of paper seventeen times. What is this, anyway? A business college? That sheet of paper looks to me like a typing lesson."

Miss Pelton whirled on him furiously. For the moment she was speechless with rage.

"There, there!" He strove to soothe her. "If you aren't careful, those big brown eyes of yours will brim over. Let's you and me try to get along. Let's call a truce. Those two passes are burning in my pocket. I can't sit in two seats at once, and there's no use in letting one of them go to waste. Suppose we have a little dinner and then use them up, you and me."

Miss Pelton rubbed at her eyes with a wisp of mauve silk. "What—what show did you say they were for?" she asked unsteadily.

"Why, I didn't say they were for any show!" Canfield answered in great surprise. "They're for the fights to-night at the Association Club. Ought to be a good card, too. Jimmy Graney, that lightweight who has been burning up New York——"

Canfield escaped from the outer office of the Kirk Steam Motor Cars, Incorporated, amid a hail of verbiage, notebooks, paper weights, and other stenographic ammunition.

CHAPTER III.

NEVER DISCOURAGED.

ON a morning about thirty days later Jack Canfield hurried into the local room of the San Francisco *Bulletin*. In one hand was a sheaf of large photographs, in the other a fistful of "copy." His manner was brisk, easy-going, confident. He was earning one hundred and fifty dollars a week and didn't care who knew it.

His course took him, by a devious route designed to carry him past each member of the staff, to the city desk. "Good morning, Andy!" he said with a smile. "How's tricks?"

Andy Anderson, the city editor, looked up from a story he was in the act of maltreating with a heavy copy pencil. "H'lo."

Then Andy returned to his story. His vicious pencil slashed out a paragraph. Calmly Canfield placed one of his pictures in front of the city editor. Andy pushed it aside and went on mutilating his copy.

To a certain extent Andy Anderson had good cause for receiving Canfield coolly. Six weeks before, Canfield had been one of the most valued members of his staff. The young man had nerve, imagination, and initiative. Once he got wind of a good story, there was no telling to what heights—or depths—he would go to make it a better story. These things made him a good reporter.

Then Canfield had been bitten by the publicity bug. He had been stung suddenly and very badly. It had resulted from a meeting on the street with one Bill Lyle, a former reporter, who had graduated from a local room at sixty dollars a week to a private office in a movie theater at one hundred a week.

At the time of that meeting, when Lyle was recounting how he had got on to himself, quit the newspaper game, and gone out and grabbed a hundred-a-week job, it never occurred to Canfield that the part of the tale which concerned the salary was "press-agent stuff." He was too thrilled by it.

Canfield had gone back to the office in a trance. Sitting down at his desk, he had written a divorce-court story in two hundred words which could easily have been run into a page-one spread with a banner line, so profoundly had he been affected by Bill Lyle's story! At noon he was still mooning, and by two o'clock he had gone to Andy and resigned his position.

"Going to do a little free-lance press-agent stuff," he had said grandiosely.

"Yeh?" Andy had returned, unimpressed. "And what am I going to do to-morrow with that hanging up at San Quentin, and the Franklin murder trial, and the water-district meeting, and Jim Flynn's funeral, and a flock of other stories that have to be covered? I'm short-handed already, with Ben Whaley

just getting over a toot and Joe Mason down in Los Angeles on that booze story. Answer me that, what am I goin' to do? I can't get a man at a minute's notice."

"Well, I can't go on wasting my time at fifty a week when——" Canfield had begun argumentatively.

"Oh, you can't, huh? Think your time's worth a couple o' hundred a week, do you? All right. Get out. And when you get hungry again, come back. I'll start you in at fifteen a week like I did four years ago and let you work up again."

Canfield had got out. The following day, in addition to the hanging at San Quentin, the Franklin murder trial, the water-district meeting, and the funeral of Jim Flynn, two big fires had broken out in widely separated parts of the city, one bank had been held up, and a ferry-boat had crashed into the pier in a fog. Andy Anderson, short-handed, had suffered three scoops in as many editions.

Canfield had stayed away from the *Bulletin* local room thereafter. He had a strong presentiment that he would not be welcomed back by Andy. Now, however, things were different. He was earning more money than Andy himself—provided he ever got it—and his position was—well, at least as exalted as Andy's, if not more so. Besides, he had a blamed good story. A good story might make up in a measure for those three scoops for which his sudden aversion to the newspaper business was indirectly responsible.

Canfield at last sat down in the chair at Andy's elbow and waited. When the city editor at length tossed his mutilated story over to the copy desk, Canfield again slipped the picture in front of him.

"Take a look at that, Andy. Good stuff, huh?"

Andy deigned to glance at the photograph. "Huh! Looks like an ordinary automobile to me. What're you so worked up over?"

"That, Andy, is the new Kirk steam car."

"Never heard of it."

"You will, though. You'll hear plenty. I'm handling the publicity for the company."

Andy twirled the photograph into the

wastebasket. "You've said plenty. Come in again some time, Jack." He raised his voice into a bellow that had struck terror into the heart of more than one cub reporter. "Hey, Dignan! Where's that story on the stockyard fire? Snap out of it! What do you think this is, a tank-town weekly? Get goin'! We've got an edition in six minutes."

Canfield grasped the sleeve of his former lord and master. "Listen, Andy! This is good stuff. This company is going to start manufacturing their new cars in San Francisco inside of a week."

"In how long?" Andy's gray-green eyes focused on the press agent suspiciously.

"In something like a month, Andy."

"How long?"

"Well, blame it," Canfield blustered, "as soon as they get a factory built!"

"That's better."

"And listen, Andy! They're going to bring out a car that's a knock-out. They've got four built already. I've been riding around town in one. Propelled by steam, you know. Say, it's a kick. No gears to shift. No clutch. No bother."

"How much are they going to cost?"

"Two thousand."

"Take my order for six and then get out. This is my busy day."

"Aw, listen, Andy! I tell you this is a real story. It's going to revolutionize the automotive industry. It's going to make the ordinary gasoline engine as obsolete as the ole one-lunger. You can't beat 'em, Andy. More power than you can ever use. Why, they'll go seventy miles an hour backward."

"Interesting if true, but who in Hades would want to go seventy miles an hour backward?"

"But it shows what the car can do!"

"Sure! But it doesn't show what I'll do if you don't get out of here and stop pestering me."

"Well, take it or leave it. Here's the story. Tells all about the car and the new company and everything. The picture you tossed into the wastebasket goes with it. Use it or not, but all the other sheets are going to give it a big play. If you take my advice, you'll use it to protect yourself."

"I learned how to protect myself when

they measured your monthly increase in weight by ounces. Now bounce along."

Canfield was apparently in high spirits when he got back to the handsome suite of offices occupied by the Kirk Steam Motor Cars, Incorporated. His pockets and hands were now quite empty of photographs and publicity stories. More than one wastebasket was piled a bit higher with photographs and waste paper.

"Well, I blasted my first big story today," he remarked to Miss Pelton, as he sat on the corner of her desk. "Went over big. The city editors ate it up and yelled for more."

Miss Pelton's brown eyes widened. "That desk over there in the corner was put in for you to occupy," she reminded him.

Canfield lounged across the room. "All right, all right, Katie. We've got to get along. I won't fight with you. Say, I've got a couple of passes."

"To a boxing match, I suppose," she remarked scornfully.

"No. To the Curran. Want to take it in to-night?"

In the four days that Canfield had occupied the desk in Miss Pelton's office, that young lady had received exactly seventeen invitations to dine, dance, and attend theaters with the new press agent. She had declined them, individually and collectively. Now, in sheer self-defense, she wavered.

"It's a pip of a show, Katie. I know the dame in the box office, and I ought to drag a mean pair of seats out of her. And dinner goes before and a little trip up to the Palais Royal afterward. Better come, Katie."

Katie nodded her head wearily, her defense completely shattered by his demoralizing attack.

CHAPTER IV.

SOMETHING FISHY SOMEWHERE.

THAT evening, seated in one corner of the Palais Royal, the lights low, the music droning a slow waltz, young Canfield's fancy turned not to thoughts of love, but to thoughts of business.

"What do you think of the Kirk layout, Katie?" he queried. "Think it's on the up-and-up?"

Katie shrugged her slender shoulders, clad now in a rose-hued gown, glimmering here and there with silver. There was one thing about Katie—she did know how to dress. She was a looker, too, Canfield said to himself, with her wide brown eyes and her petal lips and her glinting black hair.

"I don't know, Jack. Really, I don't. The car is certainly a wonder. This afternoon when I was out in it with Mr. Kirk, looking at that San Mateo factory site, he got it up to eighty-two miles an hour. And you wouldn't know you were doing over forty if you didn't look at the speedometer."

"Yes; it's a mean boat, all right. There's no doubt about that. It's got looks, speed, comfort, everything. Why, it'll even go seventy miles an hour backward! Still"—his lean face clouded and his gray eyes grew thoughtful—"still, I've got an awful hunch there's something fishy somewhere. Maybe it's Kirk's eyes. I dunno."

"I've never liked Mr. Kirk either," Katie said. "He doesn't look to me like the genius he claims to be."

"Well, you can't always tell about looks, where genius is concerned. Take me, for instance. Nobody'd ever——"

Kate cut him short with a derisive wave of her slender, well-manicured hand. "This isn't New Year's Eve. Quit blowing your horn and let's dance. You know how, don't you?"

Canfield expanded effulgently. "Know how!" He beamed at her patronizingly. "Why, I'm the bird——" This revelation of his identity was cut off by a crash of drums and trumpets. They danced.

Canfield, publicity manager of the Kirk Steam Motor Cars, Incorporated, fared poorly during the first week on his new job. On six consecutive days he delivered a story to each of the nine city editors in Oakland and San Francisco. Fifty-four stories about the phenomenal new steam car that was to be manufactured in San Francisco were produced by his facile typewriter. Just three of them saw the light of day in the public press.

His explanation to his employer, while not entirely satisfactory, was at least

typical of the highest form of press agency.

"Mr. Kirk, it's been the worst week for publicity in the history of San Francisco journalism. More actual news broke during the last six days than I've seen break in six months heretofore. What with the heavy advertising for the spring sales, the papers have been tighter than the bathing suit on a movie-comedy beauty. Why, I'd be willing to bet that if the mayor of San Francisco had died during the last week, he wouldn't have got more than an obituary notice."

Kirk's colorless eyes blinked. "If talk were money, you'd be a retired capitalist, Mr. Canfield. And unless you make good during the coming week, you'll get the gate. Got me?"

"Perfectly, Mr. Kirk."

Fate, in the form of the Chamber of Commerce, was kind to Mr. Canfield during the ensuing week, however. The week started off with a dinner given by the Chamber to the officers of San Francisco's new automobile company. The story was printed in all the papers.

Then Mr. Kirk, driving one of his speed creations through a trap on the Great Highway, was clocked by traffic officers at the phenomenal speed of ninety-two miles an hour. Four cops chased him on motor cycles for eighteen miles down the peninsula and caught him only when he stopped to buy a drink of soda water at a roadside dispensary.

Of course Canfield chanced to be drinking near beer with a photographer at the same stand. He and his camera man were much in evidence while the arrest was being made. Kirk appeared before the justice of the peace, accompanied by his faithful press agent and his photographer, and was fined fifty dollars. The following day the Kirk Steam Motor Cars, Incorporated, received at least a thousand dollars' worth of free publicity in the San Francisco papers.

CHAPTER V.

ON A CLOUD OF SUCCESS.

THE people of San Francisco, who admit they are the most progressive in the world, not even barring the real-estate agents of Los Angeles, began to

wake up to the fact that there was a genius in their city and to the further fact that a great new concern was about to be added to their industries. A committee from the Chamber of Commerce waited upon Kirk to aid him in the choice of a factory site.

The mayor rode in one of the new Kirks and expressed himself as carried off his feet by the phenomenal power, the easy-riding qualities, and the simplicity of handling of the new creation. The mayor also said other things, to the tune of half a column; he lauded Mr. Kirk's inventive genius, welcomed him to the city, hoped he'd find a suitable factory site, wished him success in the new and great enterprise in which he had embarked.

Many of the mayor's words were put in his mouth, or taken out thereof, by Canfield. However, it was all good publicity for the Kirk Steam Motor Cars, Incorporated. It was also good publicity for the mayor.

Then Kirk began to blast with full-page advertisements, urging the people of San Francisco to give their support, and their dollars, to San Francisco's newest and greatest industry, the Kirk Steam Motor Cars, Incorporated. Canfield's path became strewn with roses. Every city editor, even Andy Anderson, welcomed him with a smile and ran every line of publicity he gave them. They were ordered to do so by their respective business offices.

To be sure, the car itself was by way of proving a sensation to all who saw and rode in it. Its speed was so great that no one had ever dared to hold the throttle wide open for longer than half a minute. Its riding qualities and its ease of handling were remarkable. With a boiler of new and radical design, but recently perfected by Mr. Kirk, steam could be got up in one minute. The new car would burn gasoline, distillate, or kerosene, and was remarkably economical.

For nearly a month Canfield floated on a cloud of success. The new car had caught on. It was a sensation. A ninety-nine year lease—secured by a single month's rental—was obtained on a factory site near the China Basin. Elaborate ground-breaking ceremonies were

held, in which the mayor and a dozen civic organizations took part. The future looked rosy.

Then came the fly in the ointment of Canfield's prosperity. Kate Pelton called him to her desk on his return to the office one afternoon.

"Look at this, Jack." She held out a letter. "I—I opened it by mistake. It's about some patents. I don't quite understand it, but—but I'm afraid something is wrong."

Canfield read the letter slowly, with a sinking heart. It was from the president of the Stewart Steamer Co., a concern which had been manufacturing steam-propelled automobiles for many years. Vaguely it hinted at certain patents which were held by the Stewart Co. and which were being infringed upon by Kirk.

The press agent's dreams of affluence were suddenly shattered. He handed back the letter. "I've been suspicious all along," he mused. "Guess this fellow, Kirk, isn't the genius we thought he was. At least, not in the way we figured. His genius is more of the Ponzi order."

"You—you mean——" Miss Pelton faltered.

"I mean that here's where I do a lot of investigating. In the words of the immortal police detective: 'This thing will be sifted to the bottom.'"

CHAPTER VI.

SOME PAGE-ONE STUFF.

CANFIELD'S batting average in the publicity game hit a slump during the following three days. He was completely engrossed in his detective work. On the morning of the fourth day he appeared in the office minus his customary smile.

"Well, I guess it's back to the spuds and carrots for you, Katie," he remarked. "Do you suppose you can get back your old job with the produce company?"

"Is—is it as bad as that?" Miss Pelton's warm brown eyes were anxious.

"It's worse. The dicks will be here in half an hour to make the pinch."

"The pinch?"

"Sure! The boss neglected to get a permit to sell his stock in this State.

That's a felony, in itself. And that isn't all. Not by no means."

"How terrible!" Katie breathed.

"What? That our beloved boss gets thrown in the hoosgow?"

"No; that I lose my job and my nice office and have to go back to the spuds and carrots."

"Don't you worry, Katie." Canfield's hand grasped hers in a grip that took her breath away. "It won't be for long. Just as soon as I get back my old job on the *Bulletin*—"

Miss Pelton became very attentive. "Yes, Jack?" she prompted softly.

Canfield sighed deeply and looked out of the window. "Guess I'd better wait till I get it back before I—cross any bridges." He grasped his hat hurriedly and started toward the door. "Don't breathe a word of what I told you, Katie. I'll be back before the dicks get here."

Canfield found Andy Anderson in the act of mutilating a story with his copy pencil. "Well, Andy," he said with a smile, "I've got the biggest story for you to-day that has come over the pike in a long time. And what's more, it will be exclusive."

Andy glanced up with a long-suffering air. "Jack, if it weren't for the business office and those big ads your boss has been running, I'd chuck you out of here off your ear. You've got so you can't tell a big story from an ad for liver pills. Pass it over. I've got to run it, 'count o' the business office. What is it to-day? Did the mayor ride around the block in the Kirk again? Or has another nail been driven in the foundation of your new factory? Pass it over."

"I haven't got it written yet."

"What!" Andy roared. "Ain't it enough that we have to run your blamed publicity without writing it, too? How do you get that way?"

"Keep your shirt on, Andy. This isn't publicity."

"Show me! Go ahead and spill it. What's on your mind?"

Canfield shifted his weight to the other foot. "I won't tell you unless you promise to give me back my old job."

Andy sat up in his chair, his chest expanded, a warm smile suffused his face. "I knew it would come to this," he said

happily. "Back looking for your old job, eh? Well, try and get it. Just try and get it!"

"Listen, Andy. This is a good story. I'm not kiddin'. It's good for a banner line. Page-one stuff. The dicks are going to pinch Mr. Kirk in about twenty minutes."

Andy glared at him scornfully. "Huh! I suppose you think you can slip something like that over on me. Holy Moses, what an insult! Page-one story, huh? What's it for this time, besides the publicity for the Kirk steam car? Has he been speeding again? Or has the mayor ordered him taken into custody by San Francisco's finest in order that he may be presented with the keys to the city?"

"You're off on the wrong foot. Here's the dope. Kirk has been violating the blue-sky law by selling stock without a permit. What's more, this famous Kirk steam car is nothing less than a Stewart steamer in disguise. New body and all that sort of thing. Some of the working parts are new, too.

"But for the most part, it's nothing more than a Stewart steamer. Kirk can manufacture the car for his own use without getting into any trouble. But as soon as he starts making it to sell, the Stewart people will begin jumping on his neck for infringing on their patents. What's more, he couldn't begin to turn out the car for less than five thousand dollars. That's the price of the Stewart, you know. The whole blame thing is a skin game. Kirk figured on selling a lot of stock, starting the factory and all that sort of thing, and then skipping the country with San Francisco's dollars. Get the point?"

"Clearly."

"Is it page-one stuff, as I told you?" Canfield demanded.

"It is, Jack."

"And do I get my old job back?"

"You do." Andy sighed happily. "It will be the first story I've ever run about the Kirk steam car that didn't hurt my conscience. In fact, it will give me genuine pleasure to smear it all over page one. When do you want to go to work?"

"Right after the dicks make the pinch."

"All right. Go down and tell the book-keeper you're on the pay roll again. And

see if you can keep your feet on the ground this time. Get the press-agent bee out of your bonnet!"

Canfield shuffled from one foot to the other. "I'll—I'll be sort of looking for a raise pretty soon, Andy," he said unsteadily. "You see, I'm thinking of tying on the sign. I met a little girl up there at the office——"

Andy cut him short with a groan. "Holy Moses! If it ain't one thing, it's another in a newspaper office! Jim Hickley died yesterday, and we all had to

kick in for a floral piece. And now it'll be a wedding present for a good-for-nothing ex-press agent. You get out of here before I bounce the phone book off your bean!"

Grinning delightedly, Canfield got.

Did you like this story, or did you not? If you liked it, please let us know why in a letter, briefly worded. If you did not like it, let us know that and why. And while you are about it, comment on any other story in this number, or give us your opinion of the number as a whole.



UNDER THE TEST

By Carlyle F. Straub

THE test of a man is the fight that he makes,
 The grit that he daily shows,
 The way he stands on his feet and takes
 Fate's numerous bumps and blows.
 A coward can smile when there's naught to fear,
 When nothing his progress bars;
 But it takes a man to stand up and cheer
 While some other fellow stars.

It isn't the victory, after all,
 But the fight that a brother makes;
 The man who, driven against the wall,
 Still stands up erect and takes
 The blows of fate with his head held high,
 Bleeding and bruised and pale,
 Is the man who'll win in the by and by,
 For he isn't afraid to fail.

It's the bumps that jar, and the jolts you get,
 And the shocks your courage stands,
 The hour of sorrow and vain regret,
 The prize that escaped your hands,
 That test your mettle and prove your worth;
 It isn't the blows you deal,
 But the blows you take on this good old earth,
 That show if your stuff is real.



Roped Right—

By
William Merriam Rouse—



(COMPLETE IN
THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

READY TO FIGHT.



"ES," said Jeff Allen, as he gazed down into the liquid innocence of Celia Brownell's blue eyes; "I'm a mild man. I want to live in peace. But they won't let me. These Bildad Roaders are a cantankerous lot."

"Fighting makes me nervous!" Celia shivered in the July afternoon. "I don't see any sense in it, anyway!"

"No sense at all!" Jeff wagged his head emphatically as he leaned back against one of the wooden posts that supported the porch of Celia's great-uncle, Harlow Brewster, and regarded her with a thrill which amounted to intoxication.

A month before, she had come from the vast region known as "out West" to keep house for her Uncle Harlow. At the first glimpse of her, the long and muscular frame of Jeff Allen had become suddenly energized.

He passed as much of his time in her company as she would permit; and he intended to persuade her that it ought to be the rest of their lives. To his annoyance he found that other Bildad Roaders had been similarly affected by her masses of rich brown hair, the blue depths of her eyes, and a slender form which was as graceful as it was well rounded.

"I've—I've heard," she said gently, "that you—get into trouble pretty often."

"What low-lived gossip told you that?" demanded Jeff, with a sudden tightening of his size-and-a-half fists and a fierce glare.

"Goodness!"

She shrank away from him, and Allen remembered that he was a woolly lamb.

"Lies! All lies!" he said soothingly, while in his mind he went over the list of her admirers as far as he knew it. "They always pick out a peaceable, law-abiding man to slander!"

"Too bad!" she murmured.

"You bet it is!" agreed Jeff heartily. "The north end of York State is kind of rough."

"Oh, yes!" She leaned forward and gazed down the road. "Why, I wonder who that nice-looking young man is! He's looking this way."

Allen turned and beheld "Tip" Robarge, from the Coon Mountain neighborhood. He knew perfectly well that Tip had heard about Celia Brownell, and that he was coming to see for himself.

Jeff slid lightly from the porch. "That's my friend, Tip Robarge!" he exclaimed, with a grin which he tried to keep from seeming wolfish. "I guess likely he wants to talk to me about a dog. I'll go see."

Before she could speak, he was halfway to the front gate. He met Tip in the road, being careful to keep his back to the Brewster home.

"Where do you think you're going?" Allen demanded in a low voice.

"Up there," replied Tip with a grin. "She's darned easy to look at, even from this distance."

"Turn right around and go back home!" whispered Allen hoarsely. "I calculate to marry that girl!"

"Haw!" Robarge laughed. "I stopped at the Corners on my way up here, and I heard you was trying to hold down old Brewster's front porch all alone! If you're going to marry her, she don't know it yet, according to what they say!"

"You're a horse-toothed, flat-footed wood tick," remarked Jeff Allen in a hopeful tone.

Tip Robarge was not in a fighting mood. "Shut up or she'll hear you!" he said. "You can go home if you want to."

Blump! Jeff Allen caught him on the jaw with a right uppercut and followed it with a straight left to the nose. He missed a man-killing right swing because Tip Robarge was stretched in the dust of the road when the blow reached the place where his descending head had been.

"Either you take the back track for Coon Mountain or they'll have to carry the pieces home in a wheelbarrow!" whispered Allen fiercely. "I'm a rip-snorter, and I eat a live bobcat every morning for breakfast!"

Tip sat up and nursed his nose with a brand-new handkerchief, which rapidly became polka-dotted with red. He gazed thoughtfully up at Jeff. "Wait till you come over into my territory!" Robarge said. "Somebody's going to bend a wagon tongue over your head!"

He climbed to slightly uncertain feet, felt of his jaw, and marched down the road in the direction whence he had come. A grin twitched at the corners of Jeff Allen's wide and pleasant mouth, but he wiped it away and assumed his best prayer-meeting expression as he walked back toward the porch. He even let his head hang a little as he saw that Celia was regarding him with a look of horror.

"Too bad!" mourned Jeff. "I didn't want to do it!"

"You——" She struggled to find

words. "I saw you hit him first, Jeff Allen!"

"I had to, Celia!" he protested. "Like enough Robarge had a knife or a gun in his pocket, and he insulted me! A man can't stand still and take everything—specially if he wants to have a woman respect him!"

"No." The girl sighed. "I suppose not. But it does seem as though this was an awful rough country."

"It is," agreed Jeff solemnly, "but when I get married and settled down, they probably won't pick on me the way they do now. They think I ought to be one of the boys and fight and drink hard cider and play poker all night. But I don't enjoy such things."

"No," said Celia; "I could tell by looking at you that you wouldn't. You look quiet and steady."

Jeff flashed a glance of suspicion at her, but there was no sign of a flicker in her clear eye. He decided that she meant it. "And affectionate," he added piously, "I'll make a good family man if I get the chance."

"I guess it's time for me to get supper," remarked Celia quickly. "I'll have Uncle Harlow come out and talk to you."

CHAPTER II.

BRING ON THE HUMAN RACE.

THE girl was gone into the house before Allen could protest. He muttered a wish contrary to the longevity of Harlow Brewster and then composed his features as he heard the thump of a cane. Uncle Harlow appeared. He was an apple-cheeked old-timer with a career of iniquity that ran back to the Civil War, and his one present regret was that he was too healthy to die and get out of a world in which he no longer had great interest. Regretting so much had made him peevish. He snorted at Allen and thumped the porch floor.

"I wish somebody would give you a darned good licking," Harlow said irritably.

"I wish you'd find somebody that could do it, Uncle Harlow!" Jeff grinned. "The bigger they come, the better I like it. Tip Robarge makes three I've laid out because they wanted to spark Celia!"

"I've got a durned good mind to tell her what kind of a roughneck you be!" growled the old man.

Jeff cocked an ear until he heard sounds from the kitchen, proving that she was out of earshot. "Go ahead and tell her!" he crowed. "She won't believe it!"

"I s'pose not!" Uncle Harlow sighed. "Well, I wish ye all the bad luck in the world. They's a streak of red in that brown hair of hern, and I'm hoping!"

He stumped to a chair and eased himself into it with many groans. Jeff debated whether it would be well for him to stay and force an invitation to supper. He decided to walk around to the kitchen door and give her a chance to ask him.

"Guess I'll go along home," he said when he got there. "Poor old Uncle Harlow didn't feel like talking."

"Oh!" She turned from the stove with a fascinating smile. "I almost forgot! Don't you want to come and set a post for me to-morrow afternoon? I'm going to put up a clothesline."

"You bet I do!" cried Jeff. "I'll set posts all over the place if you want me to! Maybe I could do it this evening."

"At night?"

"Sure! It's moonlight."

"To-morrow's better!" She laughed, but with a hint of firmness. "I'm going to do some sewing to-night."

"All right." Jeff accepted this minor defeat cheerfully. Probably she did want a little time to herself. He swung off with a gentle and genial wave of the hand to her, but after he had turned the corner of the house he put both hands to his ears and wagged his fingers at Uncle Harlow. A crackling imprecation followed him to the road.

Jeff was, on the whole, pretty well pleased with the way things were going. Within the month he had thrashed Orlo Trumbull, collar-and-elbow wrestling champion of the Road, and "Chunk" Blodgett, the bully of Coon Mountain, because they had called on Celia. Two tough fights, and the encounter that day—all had been victories.

Jeff had never in his life picked a fight for the sake of hurting somebody, but naturally he was not any more averse to trouble than a bull terrier. Hence he had reasoned that the easiest way to

marry Celia was to thrash all rivals privately while posing to her as a victim. She was far too timid to marry a roughneck, if she knew it.

Jeff tried to last through the evening without seeing her, but when the crowd left the store porch at the Corners and the lights were out, he found that he could not stand it any longer. He had to have a glimpse of her or go without sleep. She often sat up late, and there was a chance.

Therefore, while most of Bildad Road was winding up the clock for the night, Jeff Allen was stepping carefully across the Brewster front yard toward a lighted window. He moved over the porch on hands and knees and peered in.

Almost then did Allen betray himself with a bellow of rage at what he saw. Separated by no more than six inches from the chair of Celia sat Byron Severance, the best-dressed young man that Bildad Road had raised in a generation. Severance could wear a white collar without looking like a strangled calf. Worse, nature had made his face good looking. He and Celia were laughing together. It was true that she was sewing, as she had said she would be, but that did not prevent her from carrying on a lively conversation.

Jeff Allen groaned. "I'll wilt that collar for him!" he muttered; and thereupon he departed for the other side of the dooryard fence, where he sat down and waited until, an hour later, the screen door at the house opened.

After a considerable time it closed again, and Byron Severance came down toward the road. Jeff rose up, and as Severance stepped through the gate a band descended upon his collar.

"What I'm going to do to you is just a warning!" growled Jeff, as his prisoner struggled in vain. "Just a warning; that's all!"

The battle was fast, but short and decisive. Severance would have needed a machine gun to equalize things, and in less than three minutes he was running for home without looking back to see what came after.

Allen dusted his hands and shook his fist. "Four!" he said. "And I don't care if it means the whole human race!"

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING WRONG.

THE thing for Jeff Allen to do, he decided as he tramped home that night, was to stay at Brewster's so much of the time that none of the others would have a chance to sneak up on him. He wanted to propose. He had the necessary courage, but somehow every time he got around to the point of asking Celia to marry him, she seemed to back away. Figuratively, he couldn't get her to stand still and listen while he told her about it.

The afternoon of the next day was not an hour old when Jeff arrived at the Brewster home. Celia and Uncle Harlow were both on the front porch waiting for him, the girl with a heavenly smile of welcome and the old man with his usual curdled look. Jeff knew that if Uncle Harlow had been back at the comparatively sprightly age of seventy he would have started a fight, and they said he had been a humdinger in his day. He made it plain that he yearned to see the starch taken out of Jeff Allen.

"There's a new cedar post in the woodshed," said Celia with a smile, "and a spade. I'd like to have it set out there in the shade of that maple so I can run the line to the house. I've got a couple of pulleys and some new clothesline."

"You just leave the whole thing to me, Celia," remarked Allen. "I'll rig the best clothesline that ever was put up since Noah got out of the Ark!"

Her tinkling laugh rewarded him in advance. Jeff tossed the big post carelessly to his shoulder, and with the greatest seriousness he began. It was pleasant to set the spade into the ground while she watched, admiringly, the play of his corded forearms.

She was very particular. He dug the hole deeper than was necessary and tamped small stones in around the post at her direction. When he finished, nothing short of a horse could have stirred that post. He bored a hole and set in the long iron which held the pulley.

"Now!" cried Celia triumphantly, as she reached for a big coil of clothesline. "You walk down toward the road, Jeff, and see how it looks. If it shows much, I'll paint it white."

"Sure!" agreed Jeff, obediently starting.

For a number of years past, Jeff Allen had thought himself superior to surprise. A great many rough things had happened to him, and he had grown into the belief that fate couldn't put anything over that would jolt him out of the ability to react with a punch.

As he ambled happily toward the road, something flickered before his eyes and a white welt of clothesline settled around his chest, pinning his upper arms. He was numbed, brain and body. The rope jerked. He went over backward, and the next instant he was slithering over the smooth grass.

During that brief journey, Allen had many thoughts. His enemies had been in ambush about the Brewster place, he decided, and they had come upon him from the rear. It was a somewhat pleasant thought, for it would prove to Celia that he was a martyr and give him the privilege of thrashing as many as he could lay hands on when he got loose.

His head bumped the post. The pulley creaked. The rope relaxed for a moment, and automatically he scrambled to his feet. Then the rope tightened again, and at the same instant he saw what was happening. His thoughts crashed. For as much as five seconds he believed that he had gone insane.

Celia Brownell was running around the post, at a safe distance, winding him up. In appearance she was a new Celia. Muscles stood out upon her lovely arms, and her mouth had lost its curves. It looked businesslike. The sun brought out a reddish streak in her hair, and Jeff dully remembered the words of Harlow Brewster.

He watched limply while she took a competent hitch around the maple tree with the end of the rope. She went into the house and came out, dragging a chair with one hand and small table with the other.

"I'm going to ease up on the rope so you can get that chair under you and sit down," she said calmly, although she was breathing a little hard. "If you try any monkeyshines, you won't get the chair."

"Celia!" gasped Jeff. "What——"

"Well! What what?" She looked at him innocently.

Allen fancied he saw a gleam in the heavenly blue of her eyes. He could not tell whether it was of amusement or warning or both. "You—you lassoed me!" he said inanely.

"I roped you," she returned, "so we could sit down in peace and quiet and talk things over. I've made some ice cream and cake, and we'll have a nice party."

CHAPTER IV.

NO WAY OUT.

DIZZY and astonished, Jeff Allen drew in and emitted a heavy breath. If a cosset lamb or a humming bird had bitten him, he would not have been any more astonished. She eased him down into the chair and lashed him fast again with a sure hand. She set the table daintily and brought out a chair for herself. Jeff's forearms were free so that he could reach his mouth with a spoon, but he found that he had no appetite.

He was brought out of the numbness following his shock by the sound of a familiar cackle. Uncle Harlow had come around the corner of the house, and at the sight which met his eyes, he slapped his leg and chirruped his joy to the world. He capered up, beaming.

"Godfreys!" he croaked. "Who done that good deed? If it ain't a sight for sore eyes, then I never see one!"

"Get out!" barked Jeff hoarsely.

"Get out—nothing!" crowed Uncle Harlow. Just then Celia came from the kitchen, bearing a plate of cake, and he grasped the situation. "By crimus, the gal done it herself! Hi-yi! She's got good blood in her!"

"Go back to the front porch," said Celia sweetly; and when Uncle Harlow didn't move, she took him by the arm and moved him.

"Ain't she a hellion?" the old man cried proudly, over his shoulder to Jeff. "I hope she hangs ye at sunset!"

Celia came back and sat down at the table. By this time Jeff had regained something resembling equilibrium, and he grinned.

"I guess it was kind of rough where you come from, wasn't it?" he suggested.

"Oh, not any more!" she exclaimed. "We had only one shooting in six months.

Somebody clipped an ear off 'Dustpan' Jones the night before I left, but that wouldn't count as a regular shooting."

"No; of course not," agreed Jeff feebly. He was not afraid of being shot, nor of anything else in the way of violence, but he did feel a strange interior sinking. There was no telling what a woman like Celia Brownell would do.

"Do you feel any milder?" she asked, as she cut a large slice of cake and placed it within reach of his restricted arm.

"I hadn't thought of it, but I guess I do feel mild." Jeff found a new idea seeping into his mind. "I feel queer; that's sure."

"I thought I could help you, Jeff," she said sympathetically. "I knew how much you wanted to get mild and quiet and real tame. Now you're all fixed. You can sit here in the shade and think how much better this is than beating people up when they try to call on a girl, or waiting for them outside the gate when they have called."

"You saw me!" gasped Jeff.

"Yes." She smiled. "I was looking out of the front-room window when you chased Byron down the road. But I had made up my mind yesterday afternoon, right after you hit that nice-looking young man. And I thought it would be better to have you set the post yourself, because you're so strong."

Jeff Allen groaned and swallowed. "You can't keep me here forever!"

"Well," she was speculative, but cheerful, "I can put a tent over you when it rains, but I suppose it'll get cold along toward winter."

Jeff let his spoon clatter to the table. He had made a brave attempt to eat, but as the full realization of his situation came over him, he found that his throat refused to work. There certainly was nobody in the world who would let him loose if she did not.

She could charge admission, if she wanted to, and all Bildad Road would pay to see the redoubtable Jeff Allen tied to a post with a clothesline. There were those who would go without eating to get the price of a daily visit.

She was revenged a thousandfold for his efforts to fool her, for his assumption that she had the sophistication of a kitten

with a pink ribbon and a bell. The worst of it was that he still felt the same way about her. She scorned him, but he loved her. He knew that a girl like her would never marry a man whom she had held up to ridicule before the world.

"Eat your ice cream, Jeff——" She stopped abruptly.

Jeff looked up from a study of his plate. Byron Severance and Tip Robarge had crossed the yard silently, and now they stood a dozen feet away with the full enjoyment of what they saw spreading over their faces. Uncle Harlow Brewster had seen them, and he was sneaking around the corner of the house.

CHAPTER V.

"RIDE 'IM, COWBOY!"

THE world grew very dark for Jeff Allen, but he set his jaw and glared with as much fierceness as he could muster.

"That's worth a hundred dollars to me!" exclaimed Severance solemnly. He felt of a discolored eye; and then he burst into wild and joyous laughter.

"I don't remember that I asked you boys to come this afternoon," said Celia in her best voice. "Did I?"

"Why, no!" admitted Severance. "We went out looking for Allen together, and we thought we'd come around this way, and——"

"And we found him just the way we want him!" interrupted Tip Robarge, as he pushed back his sleeves and fidgeted.

"Who fixed him that way for you, Celia?" asked Severance.

"Done it all by herself!" piped Uncle Harlow proudly. "By crimus, that's my sister's gal!"

Jeff strained against the rope, but it only creaked a little and cut into his arms. The chair protested. The post he had set only too well. He watched the little group with blurred eyes. Celia moved up to Uncle Harlow and whispered something to him, but the concern of Jeff was not with them at the moment.

Byron Severance was approaching with a look of fiendish glee upon his handsome countenance. He beckoned to Tip, but

Tip needed no invitation to draw near and help with the entertainment. Severance reached out and took Jeff firmly by the nose.

"As soon as I twist his nose for you," said Byron, "you can black an eye for me."

The grip of the surprisingly strong fingers of Byron Severance tightened. Jeff tried to bite and failed. He strove to prepare his soul for this depth of humiliation. Then he caught a flash of steel and recognized the big jackknife of Uncle Harlow in the hand of Celia. She sprang to his side and slashed, and the strands of clothesline popped.

"Nobody can pull the nose of the man I'm going to marry and get away with it!" she cried.

Neither Robarge nor Severance had a chance of escape. By those few, unexpected words from Celia, Jeff Allen was raised to heights from which he could have stepped off ecstatically to battle with the armies of the world. He spilled Byron Severance and Tip Robarge all the way down to the road, while from the neighborhood of the post, encouragement beat upon his ears.

"Ride 'im, cowboy!" called Celia happily. "That's it! Ride 'im!"

It was the urge toward her that turned Jeff back from the rout.

Uncle Harlow was capering and waving his stick. "What did you stop for, you durned fool?" he cackled. "I ain't had such a good time in years!"

"He stopped to come back 'and eat his ice cream," said Celia. "He wants to be mild and peaceful, if folks will give him a chance."

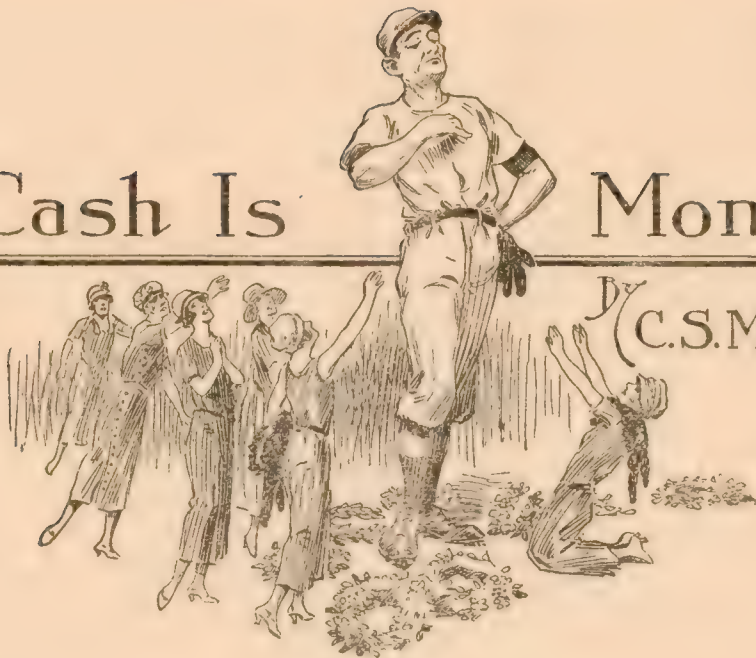
"Celia," began Jeff. "Celia—if you meant what you said——"

"It slipped out, Jeff." She smiled tenderly. "But I guess it must be true!"

Jeff Allen did not eat his ice cream immediately. He made Celia say it again.

How did this story strike you? A few words about it, if you will be good enough to write them and send them to the editor. We ask you to say, without reserve, just what you think of it. And in the same letter, please give us your opinion of TOP-NOTCH in general.

Cash Is Money ~



By C.S. Montanye ~

THE poets tell us that life is real and that life is earnest, but life to Master Eugene Perry, the twelve-cylinder pitching ace of the Camden Cardinals, was mostly reel. Any slapstick moving-picture concern with an extra camera and crank man could have shot quite a few feet of comedy film around the ball-club lot.

In nearly every scene Perry would have grabbed cheers from them, for the two-handed twirler's adventures, romantic and otherwise, would have heated the heart of any director who had ever chased that elusive thing known as "humor."

Perry, straight from the bushes, had enough conceit for a musical-comedy chorus, was as stupid as the most backward boy in any school, and, off the shelling peak, had nothing to recommend him save three fancy suits, a snakewood cane, and a few of those ties that blind.

The Cardinals, as a whole, tolerated him. The Cardinals, accustomed to hardly anything except his nonsense, were slightly astonished when Perry, after a tough game with Arlington, handed out some ten tickets for a fair and bazaar given the same night for Camden's Fresh Air Fund. "Red" Riley, the demonic

shortstop of the outfit, was inclined to be suspicious. He got nothing more than a laugh until the team, chaperoned by Larry Jones, the manager, showed up at the fair grounds that night. Then they discovered their gift pasteboards had to be cashed in with one green kiss before admission could be obtained.

II.

WHAT did I tell you?" Riley grunted when they all had dug and were passed inside. "All that Perry baby gives away is guff. Fresh-air fund, eh? Let's take it before they take us!"

Jones glanced at the gleaming strings of Japanese lanterns and the crowds around the booths, where everything from a pincushion to a pianola was being disposed of, before exchanging a look with Bob Ballinger, the big catcher.

"Keep your coat on, Red," advised the manager. "It's possible that Gene didn't understand about the admission fee. Let's look him up."

Perry was discovered a few minutes later, playing some sort of a roulette wheel where grocery staples were the prizes for the lucky winners. "Talk about good fortune!" he chortled when

his comrades of the diamond joined him. "I've got more luck than Monte Cristo. I've only been here ten minutes, and already I've won three cans of corn and a pound of flour. And all it cost me was a mere five dollars."

"Never mind the flowers," Riley cut in. "What about them tickets you gave us?"

Perry smiled. "Say, that reminds me! I forgot to tell you boys the tickets weren't any good unless turned in with a dollar."

"Is that so?" Bob Ballinger replied. "One fish to ride in. I'm glad you told me."

Jones looked at his watch. "Remember," he said, "ten o'clock is the closing hour here. We're catching the nine o'clock train for Seabright to-morrow morning, and any one not on deck when we check out is going to have a piece chopped off of his salary."

Some ten minutes later Perry took ten dollars more worth of chances on the wheel, cleaned up a jar of preserves, and decided to call it a night. With Riley and Ballinger he sauntered over to an open-air dance pavilion where a jazz band was working overtime and the youth and beauty of the town shuffled blithely along.

"What have we here?" The shortstop giggled. "I wonder what smokehouse these hams escaped from. Let's park and watch their antics."

As they took up a stand with the other spectators, Perry's eyes immediately singled out and focused on an attractive young lady who had bobbed blond hair, a smile as radiant as April sunshine, and eyes as deeply blue as an order prohibiting Sunday vaudeville. She was dancing with a tall, melancholy youth who was well supplied with ears. Her partner seemed, for some reason, to be on the verge of tears.

The double-winged pitcher immediately arranged his cravat, pulled down his vest, and coughed. "I know who that young lady is," he muttered, nodding. "Her name is Margie Walker, and her father is the president of a big insurance company. A week ago Tuesday she was having a raspberry sundae in the drug store when a girl friend came in and sat down beside her. I couldn't help over-

hearing their conversation and picking up quite a little information."

"Honest," Riley growled, "you'll land in the box yet. I suppose you told her your name was 'Radio' and that gave you license to listen in on the broad-gab. For a fact, manners to you must be something like carbolic acid—you've heard about it, but never tried it. Next Christmas I'll make you a present of 'The Book of Eddie Ket.'"

The Cardinal star twirler shot his cuffs. "I think," he muttered, "I'll just drop over and introduce myself to the chicken. Dancing, next to tossing the pill, is the best thing I do. I'll give her a treat if she'll step around with me."

"She'll step around—to a police station with you!" Ballinger cut in. "What's the idea of annoying that little gal? She's minding her business, so you mind yours."

"And you mind yours!" Perry retorted. "I'm doing her a favor—taking her away from that silly-looking goof who's trampling all over her feet."

"Let him alone," Red Riley said to the catcher. "Perry ain't got the brains of a sardine."

As the dance ended, Perry pushed a careless way through the throng, and an instant later his two teammates saw him bowing like a head waiter to the girl.

"He's got as many airs as an orchestra!" Riley yelled. "Look at 'Stupid' giving her a bend, Bob! Two to one she screams for help instantly!"

The blond young lady with the bobbed hair did nothing of the kind. Presenting Camden's best pitcher with an enchanting smile, she turned to introduce him to the melancholy youth. When the jazz band had another spasm, she promptly glided off over the dance floor with Perry's arm about her.

"Remarkable!" Ballinger chuckled.

Riley drew a deep breath. "How can you figure a dizzy parsnip like that? Positively, that jobbie could fall on his face in the gutter and come up with a pearl necklace between his teeth. Let's move. This is spoiling my whole evening!"

Outclassing Seabright in every department, the Cardinals took the home team to the cleaners the next afternoon and, aided and abetted by a sterling perform-

ance on the part of Perry, rolled up a score that won the conflict toward the ending of the fifth chapter. The team, once it was all over, made haste to wash up and catch the quarter-of-six rattler back to Camden. Perry, the last man aboard, wandered into the smoker and sat down beside Larry Jones and the shortstop.

"I understand," Jones began, moving over to make room for the newcomer, "you have a new friend, Gene. A Miss Walker, so I hear."

Perry nodded. "A very charming girl, indeed. I—ah—as a matter of fact I'm having dinner with her folks to-night. Margie simply insisted I run in and break bread with them, and who am I to refuse an invitation? Her father is in the insurance business. You've probably heard of him—Hiram Walker?"

"You'd better speak to him about a policy while you're up there to-night," Riley remarked. "An accident policy. You might need it. By the way, who is the tearful-looking bozo with the big ears?"

Perry smiled faintly. "A Cyril St. Claire. From what I gather, I imagine St. Claire has been very attentive to Margie. He's an actor, and he's here on a short vacation. I was introduced to him. He's so small he could ride horseback on an ant. It was a case of hate at first sight, I guess."

"Will this St. Claire be there for dinner to-night?" Jones asked.

"What do the old folks run—a home or a restaurant?" Riley snickered as he asked the question.

Perry glanced at the scenery sliding past the car window and then at his watch. "No; St. Claire will not be present. From what Margie said last night, I understand the family like him the same as typhoid. He's never even called at her house, and her father admires actors the same as bank burglars. Now that Margie and I are the best of friends, things will be different in the future. She might like St. Claire a trifle, but she'll get over that once I begin taking her around and spending money."

"The S in spending is silent, like dog in sausage!" Riley grinned. "If the old gent don't like actors, where do you

come in? You're a comedian, only you don't know it."

Jones gave the shortstop a look hard enough to break stone with and turned to Perry, a thoughtful expression on his face. "I hope this new friendship of yours won't affect your game, Gene," said the manager. "It's been rather a secret, but I understand the Board of Camden Jewelers intend to present you with a diamond stick pin in the near future—as a tribute to your sterling work in the box. I mention this now so you can understand what it means. Of course, if you hit a slump and go all to pieces, no diamond stick pin will be forthcoming. Get me?"

Perry widened his eyes. "A diamond stick pin, you say? Listen, do me a favor. Tell them not to make it a horse-shoe."

"Why not?" Riley asked.

The pitcher snapped a speck of dust from his sleeve. "I don't need it. I've got enough luck as it is. I'd rather have a pin in the form of a star. To—ah—remind me of Margie's eyes!"

III.

AS it turned out, the pilot of the Camden Cardinals had little cause for apprehension. For once, Perry's rôle of cavalier had no ill effect upon his sensational pitching. During the next quartette of days, spurred on by the presence of Miss Marjorie Walker and the thought of the diamond scarf pin, the youth from the bushes displayed his usual marvelous control and speed, hit like a Ruth, and turned in performances that would have caused brow-raising at either the Polo Grounds or the Yankee Stadium.

Perry stood up under hard work like a ten-ton truck, was as happy as a baby with a shotgun and as oblivious to the comments and remarks of his teammates as a deaf mute.

The Thursday afternoon game, with Camden facing the best team Red Bank had ever assembled, was an easy win for the Cardinals. Eugene Perry, bowing modestly to the frantic applause of the cheering fans, stopped to wave a nonchalant hand before turning in the direction of the clubhouse.

Red Riley fell into step beside him.

"Why don't you stick around and mop up all the applause that's coming to you?" the shortstop inquired. "Ten years from now, when you're tossing them over for some hick team out in the tall grass, you'll be glad to think back and remember the time when lovely ladies and strong men clapped to you."

"Ten years from now," the hero of the afternoon returned shortly, "I expect to be in business, not baseball. I plan to be in the insurance business. And that reminds me. To-day is Margie's father's birthday, and to-night I'm invited to a little celebration up at their house."

"What are you giving him—your presents or your presence?" Riley inquired.

"There's nothing like standing in well with a prospective father-in-law," said Perry. "I'm on my way now to get dressed so I can keep a date with a wealthy bootlegger who makes a specialty of birthday gifts. I'm getting a case of kick for him for forty dollars F. O. B."

"F. O. B.?"

"Flung overboard!" Perry answered.

He was out of the showers and into his clothes in record time. The last the team saw of him was when he galloped toward the players' entrance, buttoning his vest with one hand and knotting his cravat with the other.

"The sap of his family tree!" the Cardinal second baseman murmured. "He gets away with more stuff than a kleptomaniac. Every day I've expected to see or hear that 'Bobbed Hair' has given him the street. But he fools me continually."

Bob Ballinger, lacing his shoes, raised his head. "At that," the catcher declared, "you might get over your disappointment."

Riley registered curiosity. "My dear Watson, just what do you mean by them words?"

Ballinger shook his head. "I'm not yelling everything I know. There's no sense worrying the skipper. Time will tell."

Save for a double-header with Englewood, the latter portion of which ran twelve innings before Camden applied the frying pan and snatched the game out of the fire, the week that followed was uneventful. Eugene Perry was still a wel-

come caller at the Walker homestead, had been seen in public with the insurance king, and won games for the Cardinals with carefree abandon. His affairs of the heart had not affected his affairs on the diamond so that anybody noticed it.

Two nights after the Englewood game, Perry appeared for the dinner hour at the Hotel Antique, the team's headquarters, as pleased with himself as a cat at the sight of a new mousehole.

"Why the smiles?" Larry Jones asked.

The pitcher seized a spoon for his pot roast and stirred his coffee with a fork. "I do feel pretty good," he remarked. "I'll tell everybody why, if they keep the secret like garlic and don't breathe it to a soul. Just an hour ago I fell in with Margie's father, got my courage up, and—and asked him for his daughter's hand!"

A deep silence greeted the explanation. Red Riley was about to say something, caught the look Jones handed him, coughed, and helped himself to a glass of water.

"What happened, Gene?"

Perry sent a glance the length of the table. "What could happen? Mr. Walker informed me that after being threatened with an actor son-in-law he was only too happy to have some one come into the family who not only was a credit to Camden, but who gave useful birthday presents. He congratulated me, gave me a cigar, and a word of advice. He said that matrimony is like buying a cheap touring car—everything happens the second year."

"And the young lady herself?" Jones prompted.

The pitcher made a careless gesture. "I'm asking her the next time I see her. But that's only a mere matter of form. Just to show you how certain I am of her answer, I've put a fifty-dollar deposit down on a diamond engagement ring with a huge half-carat stone. Oh, yes, and we're going to Niagara Falls on our honeymoon. I've always wanted to see for myself if the water up there is run by nature or machinery."

The shortstop coughed again. "Excuse me if I'm speaking out of turn, but what about that Cereal St. Claire party?"

Perry chuckled. "I guess you mean 'Ears.' He's still hanging around town somewhere, but that's all. I feel sorry for the poor tramp. It must be tough to care for somebody like he cared for Margie and then have a better man come along and take her away."

Just before the dessert was rushed in, Jones rapped for silence. "There's a break in our schedule," the manager announced. "Instead of taking on the Rahway Pirates next Saturday, they've switched us up against Newark. This means that we'll have to face the best team in the league after a hard week. I want this game put on the hook. Defeating Newark means a safe berth in first place for us."

The next afternoon's nine innings was another game won for Camden, and Larry Jones, well satisfied, drew Perry aside.

"Not to be personal, Gene, but have you asked Miss Walker yet? When is the big event due to take place? You can understand why I'm interested."

Perry nodded. "Sure! I'm glad you asked me. To be candid, I—I was looking for an opening last night to put the proposal over, but didn't—didn't find any. Anyway, I was a little nervous. Asking a girl to play the game of matrimony isn't like going in and buying a suit of clothes. You've got to use discretion. Now, I think that I'll ask her the night before the game with Newark."

IV.

ON Saturday the Newark Cubs brought to Camden an enthusiastic clan of loyal fans which, combined with the home-town rooters, had ticket speculators cleaning up small fortunes before the arrival of the local gendarmes. It was evident that everybody in Camden wanted to observe their favorite team under fire. By the time the batteries were announced and both teams were warmed up, the crowd was as thick as flies in a butcher store that had a broken screen door.

Larry Jones looked the mob over from the bench and rubbed his hands. "I figured Newark would draw about as well as the Follies. Now, men, up and at them. You're tired from a tough week, but

that's out. This is our big chance of the season, and we're out to cinch the bunting. Am I right or wrong?"

"Right!" the team answered quickly.

Jones grinned. "Splendid! Make believe you've each got a whisk broom in your back pocket and get out there and clean up!"

Perry went in to uncork the game. With his usual smooth, perplexing delivery, he retired the visitors without scoring. Camden went in to bat, but showed nothing, and the game progressed. It was evident that the Cardinals felt the strain of the strenuous week. They lacked their usual steam and slowed considerably when the fifth stanza opened with both sides runless. It was after the curtain was up a few minutes on the sixth that Newark came through with its first tally, and Perry began to weaken visibly.

Jones, with narrowed eyes, sensed the let-down and crossed his fingers. He sat motionless while Perry pulled himself desperately together and blanked the side. Then he sighed with relief and got up to greet the pitcher when he came in.

"Your holding them, Gene," said the manager. "Stick it out. Remember there's a diamond scarf pin ready and waiting to find a home in one of those five-dollar neckties of yours. And remember what this will mean to that young lady with the bobbed hair. Picture her telling her grandchildren about that August afternoon when their grandfather pitched Camden to victory against the strongest team in the whole league.

"And then think of her having to tell the little tots that their grandfather had blown up and that Newark had won. Think of those innocent children and the looks of contempt and disappointment they'll give you. I should think that, if nothing else, would bring back the pep!"

Perry flexed his right wing. "Don't worry about me. I—ah—asked Margie last night to be mine forever. She's promised to give me her answer after the game, and I'll win this one or break a couple of ribs in the attempt. If you'll notice, I haven't used my left arm once so far. I've been saving it for the climax, and it's so fresh that it's impertinent. From the next inning on I'm a south-

paw by necessity. Watch what I do to 'em!"

True to his promise Perry pitched left-handed from the beginning of the next inning. Newark, who had imagined they had solved the secret of his offerings, repeated the first inning and retired in baffled haste. Still a run to the bad, Camden fought doggedly through to the completion of the ninth and went to bat, aware it was then or never.

Ballinger was up first; he played safe and walked. The Cardinal right fielder hit one, advanced the big catcher, and went to the first station himself. The enemy, overeager, misplayed Red Riley's drive to deep center, and the sacks were full with no outs. The next Camden player fouled into the mitt of the Cub receiving teller. The next man up made the home fans groan bitterly by blowing on strikes. Then Perry, his trusty war club in hand, went in to do the honors.

In silence more profound than profound itself, Perry tapped the pan and waited. The Newark twirler wound up and let the pellet ride. Jones had a brief impression of Perry bringing the stick down sharply. There came the sound of a brittle crack, a swelling roar from the stands, and he saw the Newark outfield rushing back toward the fence.

When the ball was retrieved and sent home, all three Cardinals on base had cantered in. Another game had been ushered into the glowing record of Camden's achievements.

V.

THERE was no sign of Perry until the team got back to the clubhouse and found him on the veranda, gazing dreamily across the sun-filled diamond. "Margie," he began as the others joined him, "has given me her answer at last. A letter carrier left it here a while ago in an envelope with a special delivery stamp on it."

Riley slapped him on the back. "Then what are you all gloomed up about? Honest, you're looking as dreamy as opium. Let me——"

The pitching ace sighed. "Miss Walker," he continued, "has told all. She says that she's been in love with Cyril St. Claire for two years, that when I

came along she could not help but use me as a blind to throw her family off the track. Oh, yes; and that isn't the half of it. She says that by the time I receive her letter, she and St. Claire will be married and on their way to Niagara Falls. Who could have ever guessed it?"

"I did," Bob Ballinger remarked quietly. "For three nights in succession I saw 'Goldilocks' with this St. Claire bird downtown—after you had left her!"

Perry looked at his watch and put on his hat. As he started for the steps, Larry Jones caught his arm in some alarm.

"One minute, Gene!" said the manager. "Where are you going now?"

The twirler smiled faintly. "Down to the Board of Camden Jewelers. Maybe I can switch the deposit I had on the engagement ring over to the diamond scarf pin you've been telling me about and get them to give me a check for it. Love is love, but cash is money. See you later!"

As he strolled off, Perry began to whistle cheerfully.

Fixing the Price

IT was during his annual vacation by the sad sea waves that he met her, and ere many days had passed he was madly—nay, desperately—in love.

"Ah!" he cried, as they stood on the beach. "I am poor, and you are rich! But true love levels all things, and——"

"It cannot be!" she interrupted sadly.

"Then this must be my last resort!" he exclaimed wildly, and drew forth a gleaming revolver.

Critically the fair maiden glanced at the shining weapon. "It seems all right," she said encouragingly. "You should be able to get two or three dollars on that!"

Not the Other One

IS Mr. Perkins at home?" inquired the caller.

"Which one, sir?" asked the servant. "There are two brothers living here."

For a moment the caller looked puzzled; then he had an idea. "The one that has a sister at Birmingham!" he explained.

Out of the Ashes -

By
Harold de Polo -



IN a cleared knoll in the heart of the Raquette wilderness, the famed buck of the wide region stood proudly, his head majestically raised. Very large for his kind, he looked the monarch that he was, exhibiting a spread of antlers that would have made a sportsman gasp in admiration and desire. Many, too, had done just that. In the seven seasons that he had reigned, literally hundreds of hunters had trailed him. While not more than a fair dozen had beheld him, his name had traveled so far that men came from far-off cities for the chance of a shot at him.

Probably they would have given much, these men, could they have had the opportunity of the panther that was noiselessly approaching from the fringe of woods surrounding the knoll. The great antlered head remained motionless, as the buck gazed off across the country. Slowly and cautiously, with a wind that was a veritable gale in his favor, the big cat crept closer.

He wanted this quarry more than he had ever wanted anything in his life, for it was nearly two years, now, since the buck had been evading him. Still the prospective victim stayed quiet; still the feline cut down the distance, expertly judging the maximum spring he could make. At last he must have decided, for

he crouched down, and his muscles tensed. Simultaneously with the leap of the panther, however, the buck suddenly swerved on his nimble feet. The claws of the enraged cat, as his body went by, just barely grazed the right haunch of his intended prey, and by the time he landed, the buck was already out of sight, crashing through the forest. The foiled hunter did not follow. He was too wise for that. Never, he knew, could he hope to match that dazzling speed, so with a low growl of disappointment he slipped sullenly off, more determined than ever that he would eventually win.

Once more, the saving sixth sense that the wild creatures possess had warned the buck of the Raquette region in time and saved his life.

II.

THE buck did not stop running, after his miraculous escape, for more than a mile. Whenever danger came close to him, he believed in putting just as much distance between it and himself as he possibly could. Such, all his life, had been his creed; and this trait had more than a little to do with his having evaded his enemies for season after season, coupled as it was with his truly phenomenal speed. Certainly he had speed, as any human or any wild creature who had seen him run would have testified.

It was significant that he took to the hardest going. With his tremendous leaps, his powerful muscles, his unerring feet, he was capable of negotiating, with ease, rugged and uneven ground that to another forest dweller would have been difficult and that to a human pursuer would have been painfully laborious. The buck came to a halt presently, under a ledge of rock down which a thin stream of water trickled. This time, before he paused, he was careful to scrutinize the vicinity. When satisfied that no peril lurked near, he allayed his thirst from the icy spring and nibbled at a few sparse tufts of moss.

For a while he pondered angrily and somewhat bitterly. His experience of a few minutes before, when that subtle sixth sense had warned him just in the nick of time, had been his nearest brush with death. Before the arrival of the panther in the region, two years previous, the buck had reigned supreme—defensively. His ilk do not take the offensive against the cat tribe, although the felines are their worst and most deadly enemies. Many deer, each season, fall victims to them.

The famous buck had been able to outwit and outrun every panther and lynx and wolf that had ever crossed his path; in fact, to lead them on and play with them had been perhaps his chief amusement. He gloried in the chase, reveled in it, and countless were the adversaries that he had made pursue him, as close as he dared allow, until they had literally dropped in their tracks from sheer exhaustion. Then, with a toss of his proud head, he would leap away.

This panther, though, had taught him that he had met, if not his master, at least another wild thing who was nearly his equal. The buck was wise and shrewd enough to give his antagonist the full credit he deserved. He soon came to know that the feline, for some reason, had thrown his whole heart and body and soul into the pursuit of him. It seemed to be a mania, a veritable madness.

The newcomer, with demoniacal perseverance and cunning, seemed intent from the beginning upon tearing down to his doom the antlered king. The cat had, in his span of years, brought to earth

most of the animals on whom he had lavished his hate. The deer sensed this and realized the precariousness of his position.

The Raquette buck suddenly tossed his head in a manner that implied he was trying to put unpleasant thoughts away from him. Like all the denizens of the wild, he was confronted with the ever-present and inexorable fact of hunger—of the need of food. It had been a dry season—the driest in his ken—and he suffered as much as the carnivorous animals. The leaves, the grasses, the berries were shriveled and tasteless, and as for his favorite tender young shoots, there were none. So he puzzled, now, as to the most likely place where he might find delectable sustenance, and at last he decided upon the spot.

With a snort of pleasant anticipation, he started. It was five or six miles off, but he knew that in the little-visited swamp, just beneath the dank water, there would be some succulent bulbs from the tiger lilies. Judging from his burst of continued speed, it appeared that he was going to one of those feasts that they claim are fit only for the gods!

III.

ONCE at the swamp, the buck temporarily but completely forgot about his implacable enemy. It was tricky going in this locality, necessitating deft footwork to choose the mounds of tufted earth that rose out of the murky water and that were, at the same time, safe enough to hold his weight. For this reason, few of his ilk—or few of any ilk, for that matter—ever encroached.

Consequently, he was able to munch away to the utmost of his desire. In fact, before a half hour had gone by he had obtained his fill. He raised his head to take a deep and satisfying breath. As he did so, a tremor went through him, and he came close to losing his balance and slipping off into the dangerous mire.

Immediately, however, the old-timer caught hold of himself. He stood there, eyes dilated, nostrils distended, body tense. Faintly—so faintly that only a veteran of the open spaces would have noticed it—there came to his sensitive nose

a peculiar and a disturbing odor. Once before, when he had been no more than a yearling, he had smelled it. Never had he forgotten it and never would he forget.

He had seen thousands of animals wiped out that day, and only his superior fleetness of foot had saved him. Now, as he strained his eyes, he saw behind him the same haziness of the air that had come with that odor so many seasons before. The wind, too, was increasing.

He remembered, as if it were only yesterday, the ghastly and ruthless swiftness of that forest fire. He was aware that this was the driest fall he had ever known. Nevertheless, the wily old monarch did not lose his head, but kept in his brain the axiom about the more haste the less speed. Methodically, cautiously, even daintily, he picked his way back to solid ground, apparently as unconcerned as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. Once on firmer footing, he did not hurry. For a minute or two he studied the sky, sniffed the air, scrutinized the surrounding country with the bearing of an expert.

His eyes at last rested on old Raquette Mountain and stayed there. Close to twenty miles away, the long and high range loomed up, its jagged, rocky summit sticking into the heavens like the teeth of some giant saw. The buck, after shrewd deliberation, decided to make that towering top his objective, starting for it with a cool brain and dexterous feet.

IV.

BEFORE the powerful buck had traveled two miles at a pace that would have made an opponent dizzy, the flames sent fierce fingers toward the heavens. It looked as if the infernal regions had been let loose with all their fury. Behind him, coming along with whirlwind force, was a sheet of fire that leaped up and seemed to lick at the sky with sinister, orange tongues. Behind the flaming wall that swept all before it, there was a wind that drove it along as if it were bent on devastating the world. Certainly that looked to be its idea, for the tallest and the thickest trees crumpled up before it as if they were match sticks.

The buck was no novice; he was a sagacious and a long-headed old customer. Across his path, other denizens of the forest began to appear, wild-eyed, crazed, running with every last ounce of energy they possessed. What would have been a disdainful smile in a human crossed his lips; he glanced at them, one and all, with a certain sad hopelessness. He knew full well that before the majority had gone two leagues they would be utterly exhausted. As for him, he kept his every bit of strength for the moment when he should need it most—the crucial moment that he knew must come eventually.

A young fawn, urged on by a devoted and terror-stricken doe, leaped past him as if on wings. He let them go, refusing to increase his speed. He saw that they were intent on taking the direction selected by almost every refugee—a trail that would lead to a little pond, set in a hollow, some ten miles off.

There, it seemed, the maddened wood creatures looked for safety, but the veteran deer knew otherwise. He knew that from all sides every animal imperiled by the fire would head for that precise spot. Already, in his mind he could picture the gruesome spectacle of literally thousands of the wild things, in that shallow and pathetically small body of water, being trampled and drowned and burned to death.

The buck was not positive that he would escape from the fire. He stood far less chance of reaching the summit of Raquette Mountain than the majority of wood dwellers had of getting to the pond. He was aware that it would take all his strength, all his courage, all his intelligence for him to be successful in the mighty run he had undertaken. There was one reason why he had chosen this particular destination. Once there, he would be practically certain of life. At the highest point, it was a solid mass of jagged, twisting rocks for three or four hundred feet. At the top of these, the fire below might rage on without danger to him.

About him, now, the forest was a shambles. He had never realized, and doubtlessly no others had done so, that the region held so many inhabitants. From all sides they came, large and small, the

feathered as well as the furred; and all of them that the buck observed were in the grip of an insanity that caused them to rush heedlessly ahead without reason. Gone, from those he met now, was any idea of the pond or of any definite objective whatsoever; they wanted to get away—away from that monster behind them; they knew not where they hastened. Their cries arose as the fire leaped forward suddenly.

Doggedly, valiantly, the Raquette buck surged onward. In his retreat, by now, he was almost alone. The few who had kept up with him, and survived that last onrushing blast, had gone to the pond, where death awaited them. His flanks, by this time, felt painfully roasted, and he realized that there was one thing he had not sufficiently considered.

This was the smoke—the smoke that was pouring along in the rear, at his sides, even sometimes ahead of him. It got into his eyes, into his nose, and, worst of all, into his throat. His lungs felt as if they were on the point of bursting, and his killing pace was extremely difficult to maintain.

The buck called on his reserve strength. His brave and mighty spurt against death lasted between twenty and thirty minutes. Several times, during it, the flames lashed out and singed his heels, his haunches, his ribs. Several times, during that tremendous onrush, he stumbled and went to a knee and then gamely righted himself. Several times he was blinded and choked by the smoke, but still he had kept on—ever on and on. At last he reached the base of the mountain. Vaguely, dimly, he remembered struggling up that steep and wooded ascent, with the fire on all sides of him, the only thought in his brain being that he must get to the very topmost rock on that craggy summit. Although he dropped into a coma when he did so, he made the goal for which he had so valiantly fought.

V.

THE Raquette buck, ten minutes later, suddenly leaped frantically to his feet. Crawling up onto a narrow ledge, perhaps a dozen feet beneath him, was the bloodthirsty cat, malignant hatred

gleaming in his eyes and his merciless lips lifted in a snarl.

The brain of the deer worked like lightning. He had come through the hardest tussle of his life; he had thought he would be free from his implacable enemy forever; and suddenly he was made to see that, should the panther live, it would mean the same old story of constantly being hunted and harassed until the feline had gained his wish.

The game and crafty veteran made his decision. Beside him, there was a gnarled and weather-beaten old stump, teetering on the brink of a rock, that probably had been there for centuries. He called the very last ounce of his strength into play, and, setting his head against it, hurled it down onto his snarling foe.

As the stump and the panther crashed down the steep mountainside, the cat to his doom, the Raquette buck majestically looked off over his domain. Blackened and scarred though it was, it was once more his own to rule.

Awfully Simple

TRYING hard to look as if he was always doing that sort of thing, the very young man went into the men's shop and asked to see some evening-dress ties.

They frightened him with their long white thinness and bashfully he asked the clerk as to the best way to tie the correct bow.

"That's quite easy, sir," replied the clerk glibly. "You hold the tie in your left hand and the collar in the other. Slip the neck inside the collar, and then cross the left end of the tie over the right with the left hand, steadying the right end with the other hand. Then drop both ends and catch hold of the right-hand end with the left hand, and the other with the other. Reverse hands, and then pick up the loose end with the nearest hand. Pull this end through the loop with your unengaged hand and tighten neatly into place. That's all except——"

"Except what?" gasped the youthful customer feebly.

"Well, all you'll have to do then is to disentangle your hands, sir," said the clerk blithely.

Traveler's Luck~



By William Wallace Cook-

FORTUNATELY for Silas Bagley, Jud Spencer's hired man, a tramp stopped the runaway team of horses that was dragging him along the road. Silas suffered only a sprained ankle. As Spencer was suffering from rheumatism, there was no one to do the farm work. The tramp offered to work for the Spencers, and said that his name was Than Bennet.

Silas, who was a great reader of detective stories, noticed that the initials in the tramp's hat were "N. B. S." The hired man tried to get some personal information from Bennet, but the young man answered evasively.

Since both the hired man and her father were unable to work, Mollie Spencer assisted Bennet with the chores. Alfred Hemingway, a city man who was boarding with Hiram Flack, a farmer who catered to summer boarders, came to take Mollie for a ride in his roadster. She refused to go, but Hemingway was insistent. Bennet compelled the man to depart.

With an incorrect account of this incident, Flack came to Spencer and suggested that Bennet be sent on his way, but the farmer declined. Soon after, Andrew Gade, the sheriff, on the trail of the flivver thieves, who were operating in the neighborhood, came to the Spencer farm, but he did not arrest Bennet.

There was a vacant chair at the Spencer table. No one sat there; Bennet was prevented from using it. Mollie Spencer spoke of "Ed," but asked that she not be questioned concerning him. Silas Bagley, however, was perfectly willing to enlighten Bennet.

CHAPTER VIII.

ORDERED OUT.

AFTER a short pause, during which he enjoyed keeping Than Bennet in suspense, Silas Bagley lifted his bandaged foot to a bench and settled back in his chair. "Ed," he began, "is Jud Spencer's

boy, and he was twenty-two last November. Jud ordered him off the farm last summer, an' told him flat he wasn't never to come back till he gave up Rosemary la Due. Ed wouldn't do that, and he talked up real mean, right to his pa. So he pulled out. But Ma Spencer an' Jud don't never get over expectin' Ed home.

"They keep his room jest as he left it, an' they're waiting fer him to come back an' take his old place at the table. But he ain't come, and he ain't wrote a line. Gol-binged black sheep, that's what Ed is! Still an' all, his folks keep on expectin' him. Somebody ort to wring Ed's neck for him!"

"What was the trouble?" inquired Bennet.

"Actress," answered Silas, his Adam's apple working agitatedly up and down his scrawny throat in the half gloom; "one o' them footlight favor-ites that's out of Ed's spere entirely. Reg'lar siren, this here Rosemary la Due was. Bleached blonde, with Bopeep hats an' city fixin's; but I will say she had the fetchin'est way with her!

"She boarded last summer up to Flack's," Silas went on, "and her an' Alf Hemingway was right thick. Hemingway was thick with Ed, too, an' he introduced Ed to this Rosemary actress. Trouble started when Ed lost his fool head an' took to shinin' 'round with Rosemary. We had turrible times here at the farm while that was goin' on, Than. Ever'-body was talkin' about it!

"Ma Spencer was scandalized," he con-

tinued, "an' Jud was so mad he wouldn't attend meetin's of the school board. Jud's treasurer of the board, Hi Flack is moderator, and Perry Ransom is director. Flack stuck up fer Rosemary, seein' as how she boarded at his place; an' Ransom was agin' her, bein' a deacon in the church an' hatin' the stage as a thing of evil; an' Jud, bein' in a wrangle at the meetin's all the time, jest passed 'em up. Believe me, it was the wust summer I ever put in."

"There are actresses and actresses," remarked Bennet. "There's good and bad in that profession, just as in every other."

"There's no doubt about Rosemary," asserted Silas. "What d'ye know! She smoked cigarettes! Ma Spencer ketched her at it oncet, when Hemingway drove up with her in his car, coming after Ed. Ma Spencer seen Rosemary smokin' from a winder, an' she cried an' threw herself on Ed an' begged him not to go ridin' that afternoon. But Ed went. He was reg'larly crazy about Rosemary. And he liked Hemingway a lot, too."

"What did Mollie think about it?"

"Mollie had finished her term of school teachin', but she wasn't to home when the trouble began," replied Silas. "She was visitin' friends in Hanover. Ma Spencer got her home right off. Along at fust, though, Mollie was kind o' easy on Ed. She was inclined to take Rosemary's side, 'spite o' that blamed cigarette smokin'."

"After she met Rosemary, though, Mollie sort o' went over to the side of her ma and pa. She couldn't shake Ed any more'n she could shake the Rock o' Gibberaltar. I tried my hand, bein' some persuasive by natur' an' a man o' the world like, but by jolly, that Ed come mighty nigh liftin' his hand to me! Fact! But he didn't. All he done was to tell me plain to mind my own business."

"I remember as though it wasn't more'n yest'day the awful scene between Ed and the fambly in the sittin' room," Silas went on. "Jud's face was blacker'n a thundercloud as he told Ed to give up Rosemary or git out. Ed went upstairs, put on his best clothes, packed his satchel, came down, and walked out of the house without a word. Ma Spencer fainted

plumb away; an' Jud, not havin' the rheumatiz' then, rushed out on the porch.

"'Ye got a home here when ye git some sense,' he yelled at Ed, 'but don't ye dare come back till ye give up that hussy!' he says.

"But Ed he never says ay, 'es, er no, but jest walks 'away down the road, swingin' his satchel. He ain't been seen or heard of since. Rosemary la Due an' Hemingway left Flack's purty quick after that. Hemingway's back this year an' Mollie sort o' took up with him. I figger she's tryin' to learn somethin' from him about Ed an' Rosemary. But if she's found out anythin', she ain't said a word."

Silas eased his bandaged foot a little. "I swan," he added helplessly, "I dunno what's come over young folks nowadays. Give 'em an inch an' they'll take a mile; an' if ye don't let 'em do as they please—gol bing! They'll do as they please anyway. What's the world comin' to, Than?"

"Some people," said Than Bennet, "will only learn by experience. It teaches a dear school, but"—and here a little bitterness crept into his voice—"fools learn in no other."

"Ye nicked the bull's-eye that time!" agreed Silas. "You goin' to stay on here through harvest, Than? I heard Jud askin' ye about it, but I had to answer the phone an' didn't hear what ye said."

"I have agreed to stay as long as he needs me," Bennet answered.

"Say, that's prime! Dinged if I know what Jud 'u'd do if it wasn't fer you. Mobby I can limp around an' be sort of half a man durin' harvest. More'n likely I can set up after the reaper. We'll thresh from the shock this year, an' we'll change works with the neighbors. That'll mean you'll have to put in some good licks in five or six diff'rent places. Now that you was cur'ous 'bout Ed," went on Silas artfully, "an' I've made that business plain, I don't mind sayin' I'm tolerable cur'ous about you. Where d'ye hail from, an' what's the idee o' your doin' this trampin'?"

"I've only been a rolling stone since last April, Than," said Bennet.

"I'm yer friend, don't mistake that," proceeded Silas earnestly. "Ye didn't

have to leave no place fer the place's good, did ye?"

"For my own good."

Silas began to shiver with inward excitement. He was getting a rise to his probing questions. It was more than he had expected, and it gave him tremors. "'Twasn't fer—fer a safe-crackin' job, was it, Than?" he faltered.

"No; not for safe cracking."

"Ye—ye didn't kill nobody, did ye?"

"No; I never killed anybody."

"Then what in the nation was it fer?"

Bennet got up from the hammock, yawning and stretching his arms. "For my own good, Silas, and that's all I can tell you now," he said. "I'm for bed. Want me to help you into the house?"

As he gave Silas an arm to the porch, the latter requested: "Don't let on that I told ye about Ed. Jud's ordered that no one around this farm is to talk about Ed, or so much as mention his name."

"I consider it a confidence," promised Bennet, "and I'll not say a word about Ed to anybody."

"Ed's got the bit in his teeth an' is drivin' hard to dee-struction. I don't allow he'll ever come back to the farm no more."

CHAPTER IX.

MAKING PLANS.

IF corn is knee-high by the Fourth of July," said Jud Spencer, repeating a saying handed down from one generation of farmers to another in the Middle West, "then it's pretty apt to be out of the way by frost." If planted "when the leaves of the oaks are as big as rabbits' ears," by Independence Day it must reach to a man's knees to be properly advanced.

Jud Spencer had no fault to find with his ten-acre field of corn. Bennet was going through it with Old Ned and the cultivator on the forenoon of July third, and the horse had to be muzzled to keep him from nipping the tender green corn tops.

The field was at the roadside; and, about ten o'clock, Mollie came along the road with a gallon jug of cool water for the tramp hand who, she judged, would probably be thirsty and in need of such refreshment.

Bennet smiled happily at sight of the

girl. Leaving Old Ned and the cultivator at the end of the corn rows, he reached across the fence to take the jug from Mollie's hands, thank her for her thoughtfulness, and then drink long and deep. After that, he rested for a space, leaning on the old rail fence, with Mollie's sun-bonneted head beside his own.

"Going to finish by noon, Than?" the girl asked.

"Easily," was the answer.

"Then, after dinner, you're to go to Hanover with me in the flivver. I'm to do some trading, and you're to get six bags of feed at the elevator and load it in the tonneau."

"Fine!" cried Bennet.

"And to-morrow," continued Mollie gayly, "you're to take mother and me to the Fourth of July celebration in town. It's to be at River Park in the afternoon. There'll be races, a patriotic address by one of the senators from this State, and fireworks in the evening. About five o'clock there'll be a balloon ascension and a double parachute drop!

"And there'll be band music," added the girl, her eyes dancing. "Dad and Sile can't go, of course, and I had a hard time persuading mother to leave them; but she at last agreed, just to please me. If it wasn't for the chores, Than, we could stay for the fireworks."

"I'll come back and do the chores, Mollie. You and your mother can stay with your friends in town, and then I'll drive the car back and get you."

"That would be splendid!" exclaimed Mollie. Impulsively, her small hand dropped on the larger one on the top rail and rested there for a moment. "I think you're one of the best men that ever lived, Than Bennet!" she finished.

Bennet looked at her bright eyes and glowing face, then suddenly turned away his head. "You're willing to go to this celebration with your father's tramp hired man?" he asked, still keeping his gaze averted.

"I'm proud to go anywhere with a real man like you," replied the girl softly.

It was the merest trifle of a moment in life, as moments go, but Bennet jerked his head around quickly, and the girl's eyelids dropped under his steady, probing gaze. He said nothing, but brought his

other hand around and laid it gratefully over the girl's. So they stood for perhaps the duration of a dozen quick heartbeats, his eyes gleaming; their hands three-deep on the top fence rail.

At just this moment Perry Ransom, deacon in the church and director of the school board, came along the road in his battered old automobile.

Ransom was watching the two by the fence when he ought to have been paying attention to his driving. Every one in the school district knew about "Spencer's tramp," and Ransom always took as much or more interest in the affairs of his neighbors than he did in his own. This was especially true when he considered his neighbors' affairs "a leetle mite off-color."

"That's a nice how-de-do!" Perry Ransom was saying to himself. "Dinged if that tramp of Jud's ain't sparkin' Jud's girl! I'll chip in right here and put a stop to it, by jiminy!"

Here was a delicious morsel of gossip that appealed mightily to Perry Ransom; but he adjusted his mind to what he thought to be a feeling of outrage on Neighbor Spencer's account. He planned to stop and speak sharply to Mollie and even more sharply to the tramp.

Ransom stopped, but not as he had anticipated. With his eyes on the two at the fence, his flivver left the road. The two left-hand wheels slid over the edge of a steep bank at that point, and the car turned over on its side.

Ransom gave vent to a frightened yell and endeavored to escape. He got out of the car just in time to be trapped by the running board, which fell across his legs, and by the side of the machine, which lay across his chest. Had the car been a heavy one, he would probably have been crushed and mangled; as it was, he was merely pinned down and rendered helpless.

Yelling and struggling, he looked up to see the tramp bending down over him and using a fence rail to pry the car off his body. Ransom worked his way into the clear, and the tramp at last took hold of him and helped him to his feet.

"I guess you're not hurt much," remarked Bennet, still continuing to pry at the light machine until he had it on its wheels again.

"I might 'a' been killed," fussed Ransom. "I don't know now but what mebbey I got a rib cracked."

"Oh, no," spoke up Mollie, busily dusting off the director; "you're all right, Perry. And the car's all right. Isn't it, Than?"

Bennet had pushed the machine squarely into the road. The engine was running, just as though going on its beam ends was nothing unusual.

"Seems all right," Bennet answered.

Ransom patted his chest and bent down to rub his bruised shins. "Can't tell about everything being all right till I git to home," he said. "It ain't in reason that a man can turn summersets in a flivver without doin' some damage. The car and me are both able to navigate, though, and that's somethin'. I'm goin' to raise Cain with the road commissioners for neglectin' these east-and-west roads like they do. It's dangerous!"

He limped to the car, got aboard, and started off. He forgot to thank Mollie and the tramp for services rendered, and he forgot to speak harshly to Mollie and the tramp on the score of their little tête-à-tête across the fence.

Mollie, who perhaps surmised the cause of the accident, flushed rosily and laughed a little as she went back toward the house. Bennet resumed his cultivating; and there was a song in his heart that now and then arose to his lips.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, Perry Ransom and his flivver were back on the same east-and-west road. This time he drove into the Spencer farmyard, got out of his machine, and stalked through the kitchen and into the Spencer sitting room. Ma Spencer was "starting" supper. She knew, by the stormy look in Ransom's face, that there was something ill in the wind; so she followed him nervously from the kitchen.

Jud and Silas were in the sitting room. The family had been made aware of the accident to Perry Ransom during the noon meal.

"Hope you weren't hurt when your car left the road this morning, Perry," said Jud Spencer.

"Some mirac'lous," answered Ransom, "but I wasn't hurt a mite. Where's that tramp o' yourn, Jud?"

"Gone to town with Mollie," returned Spencer.

"This is worse'n I thought!" Ransom grunted. "I'd never have believed you'd let them two go skylarkin' around together. You forgettin' this new hand of yours is a tramp?"

"He had to go after some feed at the elevator, Perry," apologized Mrs. Spencer, "and Mollie went along to do some trading. And, really, we're all thinking pretty highly of Than Bennet."

"I can look after my own family, Perry," spoke up Jud Spencer testily, "without askin' any of the neighbors' help."

"No offense intended, Jud, but just a warnin'," said Ransom. "What I'm here for is to get thutty dollars I lost when the machine tipped over."

"Thirty dollars?" echoed the farmer, while Silas pricked up his ears and showed intense interest. "How in Sam Hill do you expect to find the thirty dollars here—if you lost it when the machine tipped over?"

"This tramp you're beginnin' to think so much of helped me out from under the car. When I git home I miss the wallet with the thutty dollars. There's only one answer to that, Jud."

"The man's honest, Perry, I'm sure of that," Spencer averred.

"He wouldn't bother to steal no thirty dollars," put in Silas.

Just at this moment the Spencer car wheeled into the yard, detoured around Ransom's flivver, and halted at the kitchen door.

"Bring the tramp in here, Jud," said Ransom sternly, "so'est I can have this out with him."

CHAPTER X.

ALL SEEMED AGAINST HIM.

AT once, Mrs. Spencer, greatly agitated, left the room to call to Bennet from the kitchen door. Mollie ran in with a load of bundles, and Bennet followed with another load. Most of Bennet's bundles were left in the kitchen, but he brought a long pasteboard box into the sitting room and placed it on a chair.

"Than," remarked Jud Spencer, "Mr. Ransom lost a wallet containing thirty

dollars when his car tipped over at the roadside this morning."

"Sorry to hear it." said Bennet.

"You better be sorry, Mr. Man," cried Perry Ransom, "because I've got a right good idee what become of that thutty dollars! Hand it over to me, here and now, and I won't make any fuss."

A slow red crept into the tan of Bennet's face. "You mean to imply that I took your thirty dollars, sir?" he asked with a touch of anger in his voice.

"I ain't aimin' to imply nothing but the truth."

Mollie flashed an indignant glance at Ransom, a soothing glance at Bennet, and then, so quietly the maneuver was not noticed, left the room.

"I bought a suit of clothes in Hanover," proceeded Bennet, "and the suit and some other things cost me exactly thirty dollars." There was a humorous gleam in his eyes. The situation, however, was utterly lacking in humor for Perry Ransom and the others.

"Take them clothes right back and git the money," ordered Ransom. "I sold hogs for that thutty dollars, and I'm wantin' the money and not clothes."

There was a pained look in Jud Spencer's face. "Where did you get thirty dollars to spend for clothes, Than?" he asked.

"It ain't hard to figger that out," said Ransom.

"I had the money, Mr. Spencer," asserted Bennet. "It wasn't Mr. Ransom's hog money."

"Who ever heard of a tramp with thutty dollars!" scored Ransom. "It ain't in reason. If a tramp had thutty dollars, he wouldn't be trampin'—he'd be ridin'. I don't want to be hard on you, Bennet, and if you fix it so'st I can git my money, we'll let this drop. What Jud here does, after you being showed up in your true colors, is his business and not mine."

For a person suspected of pocket picking, Than Bennet was most cheerful and undismayed. His first touch of anger had given way completely under the glance of confidence with which Mollie had favored him. He was looking the situation genially in the face. "I'm going to keep the clothes, Mr. Ransom," he said, "but I'll try and find thirty dollars

in cash for you—if you can prove that I took your hog money.”

“Got all the proof needed!” declared Perry Ransom. “Leave it to Jud.”

“Bennet,” remarked Spencer, “I am surprised and grieved. Circumstantial evidence is all against you. I’ll have no light-fingered person working for me.”

“Then I’m discharged?” asked Bennet.

“You’ll stay right here until I can call Hanover and get the sheriff. Ma,” he added to his wife, “call Gade on the phone.”

Mrs. Spencer was almost in a state of collapse. She fumbled with the receiver, and her voice choked as she tried to put in the call.

“Don’t be worried, Mrs. Spencer,” said Bennet kindly, hurrying to her side and taking the receiver. “I’ll call the sheriff.”

“An’ put up some trick, hey?” protested Ransom, snatching the receiver out of his hand. “I’ll do the talking myself.”

He had some difficulty in getting the sheriff’s office. The line was busy. Party lines are usually busy when one wants somebody in a hurry. During the dramatic pause while Ransom was hanging over the telephone instrument and waiting for the line to clear, Mollie ran into the sitting room. She was breathless, but jubilant, for, held high in her right hand, was a long, worn wallet.

“Is this yours, Perry?” Mollie cried eagerly.

Ransom jerked himself away from the phone. “My land,” he gasped, “if it ain’t! Where’d you find it, Mollie? In the tramp’s room some’rs?”

“No; in the weeds at the foot of the bank where your car turned over, Perry Ransom!” she told him scathingly. “It seems easier for you to suspect an honest man of stealing than to go and take a look over the scene of your accident. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

There was a short silence.

“Afore I begin to feel ashamed,” said Ransom with a chuckle, “I’ll just see if my thutty dollars is in that wallet.”

The money was there, every grimy bill of it.

No sense of shame touched Perry Ransom, however. “When a man’s a tramp, he’s got to stand bein’ suspected of things like this. Glad I got my hog money

back, though. No offense, Jud. So long!”

He left the house, and his flivver could be heard grinding into action. As he rolled out of the yard, Than Bennet dropped into a chair and laughed till he choked.

“This come mighty nigh being anything but a joke, Than,” remonstrated Silas, mopping his moist brows with a red bandanna handkerchief. “Mollie saved the day fer ye.”

Bennet’s face straightened, and he turned to the girl. “Ransom’s ‘thutty’ dollars doesn’t measure my gratitude to you, Mollie, for what you have done,” he told her earnestly. “Three million dollars would be nearer the mark.”

Then, whistling cheerily, he went out to the car and drove off toward the barn with the six bags of feed.

CHAPTER XI.

DEMANDING AN ANSWER.

IN his new suit and wearing a new straw hat, Than Bennet was a figure to fill the eye. It was only a cheap, two-piece summer suit, and the forever memorable thirty dollars Bennet had spent had included also the hat, a new belt, a soft shirt and collar, and a bow tie.

He was rather a fastidious* person in the matter of appearance. As Silas put it, he was “a heap more trouble to himself than the majority of tramps, shavin’ ev’ry day, dustin’ his clothes reg’lar, wearin’ his coat to meals, an’ the like o’ that. An’ what d’ye know, by jing? Blamed if he ain’t down to the creek fer a bath each mornin’ an’ evenin’, splashin’ ’round in the ole swimmin’ hole same as a boy.”

These were habits which, like his correct speech and pleasant manners, set him apart from the genus hobo. Now his new outfit of clothes, worn with the easy grace of one accustomed to purple and fine linen, not only aroused admiration in the Spencer household, but gave Jud Spencer some uneasy reflections. Mollie was the only one who did not seem surprised by the transformation.

“Than,” said Silas with a chuckle, “ye’re so blamed splendiferous in yer new duds ye remind me o’ them drummers that come to Hanover sellin’ goods.”

"Drummer!" scoffed Mollie. "Why, our hired man is an Admirable Crichton!"

"He don't look no more like an admiral than I do," Silas protested.

They started for the celebration at nine a. m.—Mrs. Spencer, Mollie, and Bennet. The flivver was decorated with a flag, and Bennet was at the wheel. Mrs. Spencer was adamant in her determination to return in time to get supper. Dinner for the two left at home was partly on the table and partly on the gasoline stove.

Mrs. Spencer's last words had to do with the lighting of the stove and the preparation of that part of the meal which was to be served hot. The good lady felt like a runaway, and Mollie soon realized that it would have been cruel to insist on her mother's staying in town for the fireworks.

"Fust time I ever missed a Fourth," commented Silas glumly, when he and Spencer found themselves alone together in the sitting room. "Even the blame' clock ticks lonesome."

A party of city folks from Flack's rolled by in a big car decorated with bunting, blowing horns, throwing fire-crackers, and exploding torpedoes. Silas scowled at his bandaged ankle and reached for his pipe and tobacco.

"There's something queer about that tramp hired man," mused Jud Spencer. "He's not what he seems, Sile, that's plain."

"He seemed to have stole Perry Ransom's thirty dollars, but you see he didn't."

"If I thought he was brazen enough to have any designs on our Mollie, I'd—I'd kill him, I guess. What do you think about that, Sile?"

Silas' detective instincts had already covered that point. According to his way of thinking, between Mollie and Bennet the attraction was mutual. He knew it wouldn't do to have Jud stirred up about Mollie as he had been about Ed, however, so Silas pooh-poohed as a fiction what he felt to be a fact.

"Oh, fiddle-dee-dum!" jeered Silas. "Mollie's got too much sense to go losin' her heart where she hadn't ort to. You ort to know that, Jud, better'n anybody."

"Seems like the way Than's been fixing

himself up," the farmer returned, "he must have had Mollie in mind."

"Don't be so foolish," Silas admonished.

He had a guilty feeling, however, whenever he thought of the initials in the old Panama. His wits were constantly milling around that proposition and Andrew Gade's furtive call at the farm with a written description that fitted Bennet like a glove. Silas feared the time might come when he would have to strip away a mask of pretense and reveal Bennet as a criminal. He pictured himself doing that with mingled feelings of wild joy and consuming regret, but hoped the day was far distant.

In town, Bennet waited upon Mrs. Spencer and Mollie with the most assiduous attention. He secured choice seats for them in the grand stand by the post office, from which to view the parade; and when the ex-service men with the flag marched by, he stood at attention, uncovered, and saluted in a way that proved to Mollie, at least, that he should have been in the marching ranks.

"Where were you during the World War, Than?" Mollie asked him when the parade was over.

"Rainbow Division!" The tramp's face was flushed, and his eyes glowed. "I was at——" He caught himself up. "Oh, well, never mind," he finished.

Mollie did not press him further, but her pride in this Admirable Crichton fed upon the very silence with which he turned her question.

Bennet insisted on taking the women to dinner in the finest restaurant in Hanover. He paid the bill, and Mrs. Spencer chided him for his extravagance. At one o'clock they drove out to the park, listened to the speaking, and saw the horse races. At least twice the three from the Spencer farm encountered the merry party from Flack's, and one of the party was Alf Hemingway.

On those occasions Hemingway looked contritely at Mollie; and Mollie, as Bennet could see, turned her head away resolutely. Then Hemingway's eyes tossed daggers at Bennet, as though laying on his shoulders the burden of the estrangement.

At five promptly the balloon ascension

was made, and two parachutes dropped gracefully to earth from the sky.

"Now we'll go home," said Mrs. Spencer with a sigh of relief; "we'll go home to pa and Sile, Mollie, and see that they have a good supper to make up for the makeshift dinner. I do wish they could have been with us."

It had been a noisy, tumultuous day, filled with explosions, band music, oratory, races, and excitement. The fireworks were yet to come and promised much in the way of a spectacle. Than understood fully how Mollie had set her heart on an evening in town, but she yielded to her mother's wishes without a protest.

At a quarter to six they were back at the farm, Mollie and her mother bustling around and getting supper, and Bennet shifting from his new clothes to his old ones and looking after the stock. At six thirty, half an hour behind the usual schedule, Mollie appeared in the kitchen door.

"Supper, Than!" she called.

With his usual care Bennet prepared himself for the evening meal. When he appeared in the dining room to take his place at the table, Mrs. Spencer and Mollie were regaling the two stay-at-homes with the events of the day. What Senator Porter had said was remembered in substance and repeated at length.

Jud Spencer found fault with the senator's remarks because he had shown little regard for the vital problems affecting the farmers. "If I had been there," he said wrathfully, "I'd have asked the senator some questions he'd have found it mighty hard to answer."

"Never mind about politics, pa," interposed Mrs. Spencer. "Supper's waiting."

All took their accustomed places. Jud Spencer's rheumatism was slowly leaving him, and Silas' ankle was mending. Less and less attention was demanded of Mollie and her mother in making the invalids comfortable.

Grace before meat was a prime article of faith in that household; and, just as the head of the family had bowed to offer thanks, there was a movement at the door from the kitchen which caused all to straighten in their chairs. A young man stood hesitating inside of the room.

He was a dusty young man, none too well dressed, and his head drooped in a hangdog sort of way. His manner suggested a furtive doubt as to the quality of his reception.

"Ed!" The one word escaped Mrs. Spencer in a half sob. She started to her feet. "Oh, it's Ed! It's Ed!"

Mollie also got to her feet. Both women would have hurried around the table had not Jud Spencer, strange lines twisting in his face, interfered.

"Mother, you and Mollie stay right where you are! Young man," the father demanded of the prodigal, "have you learned your lesson? Have you come back to us with clean hands and a clear conscience? I don't think you ever lied to me, so answer yes or no."

"Yes—dad," faltered the prodigal.

Joy filled the face of Jud Spencer. He waved a hand to his wife, and she ran to her son and was taken in the son's arms, nestled close to him, and, with eyes streaming, murmured constantly: "My boy, my boy!"

Bennet got up quietly and left the house. It was a moment sacred to the Spencer family, and he considered his presence an intrusion. A few minutes later Mollie came for him, fairly beside herself with happiness.

"Now, Than," she said, "you know who Ed is—my wandering brother, home again after a year in Chicago. Some time I'll tell you all about it. Come in now, come in to supper; I want you to meet him. How glad I am, Than, that mother and I didn't stay in town for the fireworks!"

Obediently Bennet followed the girl back into the house.

CHAPTER XII.

SHADOWS IN THE DARK.

ON the morning of the fifth of July, Than Bennet hitched Old Ned, Prince, and Star, a five-year-old bay, to the binder and drove into the wheat. All the harness stock of the Spencer farm was thus put to work.

The return of Ed Spencer did not mean that the tramp hand was to lose his job. Handling all the farm work, even with Mollie's help, was considered too hard

for Ed, and Bennet was to be retained at least until threshing was out of the way.

It was clear to Bennet that Ed, younger than Mollie, was Mrs. Spencer's favorite. In Ed, as Silas put it, the sun of the Spencer family rose and set. From his babyhood he had been coddled and spared, receiving more consideration—Bennet thought—than had been good for him.

In the matter of Rosemary la Due, Jud Spencer had sternly sacrificed his feelings for what he thought to be his Spartan duty. The year of absence and silence on the son's part had silvered the farmer's hair, but he had held grimly to the course he had set for himself. His Puritanical ideals were not to be shaken by personal or family sorrow.

The home-coming of Ed, seemingly chastened and eager to resume the old life, transformed the household. Ma Spencer and Mollie sang as they worked, the head of the family announced that his rheumatism was better and that he would soon be back in harness again, and Silas put his game foot on the floor and boasted that he could "purty nigh" bear his weight on it. After the threshing, Bennet pictured himself taking to the road once more with his stick and bundle; but, oddly enough, he did not find the picture attractive.

As the golden grain dropped in bundles from the binder, Ed followed along and set them up. He worked hard and to good purpose, although constantly reminded by his doting mother not to overdo.

Bennet was merely tolerated by Ed. The son evidently was influenced by the new hand's shady origin and would not give him his confidence and friendship. Bennet regretted this on Mollie's account, but otherwise the aloofness of Ed touched him lightly.

There was something furtive about Ed Spencer which the members of his family, in their new-found happiness, seemed to miss. Even Silas, notwithstanding his detective instincts, was blinded to the fact. Bennet, however, being outside of the charmed circle, was an impartial observer.

On those Sundays when rheumatism kept Jud Spencer from going to church

in Hanover, the rest of the family remained at home with him. In lieu of the accustomed Sunday morning service in town, Jud Spencer assembled his household in the parlor, read from the Scriptures, and Mollie played hymns on the piano, and all joined in the singing. There was a service of praise and thankfulness on the Sunday morning following Ed's return.

Jud Spencer, in a voice that shook with emotion, read the beautiful story of the Prodigal Son. Ed, in a chair drawn close to his mother's, listened with bowed head; but the mother held her own head high, her face glowing, and one of her arms lying across her son's shoulders. In the singing that followed, Bennet's voice, a rich baritone, joined beautifully with Mollie's clear soprano.

"Ye can't tell me!" Silas whispered to Jud Spencer. "That tramp's been to sing-in' school! Reels them hymns right off without ever lookin' at the book, too! Say, Jud, he's a reg'lar cornundum."

In the afternoon Mollie wanted a motor ride. She invited her father and mother, Ed and Sile to go along. The five would just fill the flivver, and she believed that a ride would do her father and Sile no end of good. None of the others, however, cared to go.

The farmer dreaded the shocks of the rough roads, and Silas' excuse was the same. Ed wanted to loaf out the day on the old farm, which he professed to prize more than ever since his experience in the city; and Ma Spencer wanted to be with Ed—she could not bear to have him out of her sight a minute.

"Well, Than," said Mollie brightly, "that leaves just you and me. What sort of an excuse have you got?"

"No excuse at all," answered Bennet. "I'll be glad to take a ride."

Ed watched the two drive out of the yard with narrowing eyes. "Mollie seems to be taken up with that tramp a lot more than she ought to," he remarked peevishly.

"I don't believe he's a regular tramp, Eddie," Mrs. Spencer said. "Than's been wonderful to all of us since he's been here. As for Mollie's being taken up with him, that's nonsense. He's just a hired man, like Sile."

"There's a big difference between this tramp and Sile," grumbled Ed.

Jud Spencer made it a rule never to do any week-day business that wasn't absolutely necessary on Sunday; but Perry Ransom drove to the farm, on this particular Sunday, and turned over to him two hundred dollars in bank notes. The school house was being repaired; the contract price for the work was just two hundred dollars; the carpenters would be through on Monday afternoon; and Spencer, treasurer of the school board, was the one to settle for the work.

"Put that money away some'rs where it'll be safe, Jud," warned Ransom. "Don't let that tramp hired man o' yours get wind of it."

"After your experience with my tramp hired man, Perry," returned Spencer, "I should think you'd be the very last person to doubt his honesty."

"Never had no use fer a tramp," was the answer, "and I ain't fallin' for this one, same as the rest of you seem to be doing."

Spencer, after Ransom had left, put the ten twenty-dollar bills into an old wallet and concealed the wallet in the depths of a drawer of an old writing desk in the sitting room.

Ed watched the operation, then asked, as his father turned away from the desk: "What experience did Perry Ransom have with that tramp of yours, dad?"

Ed had no love for Perry Ransom; and he loved him less for certain remarks Ransom had just made about the good sense he had shown in leaving Chicago, with all its temptations and pitfalls, to come back to the farm and the home folks. Even when tendering congratulations Ransom knew how to wrap up a rebuke and a warning in his words.

Jud Spencer told his son about the "thutty" dollars.

Meanwhile, Mollie and Bennet were enjoying their motor-car ride; and Mollie, excited and happy, was telling Bennet as much as she thought advisable about Ed.

"He never saw Rosemary la Due all the while he was away, Than!" she exclaimed. "She was traveling with some road company, I suppose. Ed worked as porter in a hotel, made just a bare living,

and got enough of it. He stuck it out for a year, got lonesome, and made up his mind to come home.

"My, but he is a different Ed!" she went on. "Lessons like that come hard, but they are the best thing in the world for young men. Alf Hemingway is still at Flack's, but Ed has promised father not to see him or have anything to do with him. He has an evil influence on this brother of mine."

Silas was right, Bennet knew. Ed was the apple of his mother's eye, and for all the family "the sun rose and set" in him. If the boy lapsed again from the strict path his people had set for him, there would be broken hearts on the Spencer farm. Bennet tried to convince himself that he was mistaken in his estimate of Ed; but he could not, and his mind was troubled.

When the clock struck twelve that night, Bennet, who was a light sleeper, was roused by a muffled sound inside of the house. Sitting up in bed, he listened intently. The old stairs were creaking under stealthy feet, going down. He got quietly out of bed and stood alertly by his hall door.

Other muffled sounds came up to him, sounds which he could not definitely analyze. He was sure only of a shuffling of papers, hurriedly handled. A few minutes of that, and then came the closing of a door.

Bennet moved to the window of his room. Directly under the window was the kitchen roof. Across the roof, in the moonlight, he had a fairly good view of the barn, the silo at one end of it, and of the shed used as a garage, midway between the kitchen door and the barn.

A shadow, stark in the moonbeams, was gliding across the space that separated the kitchen from the garage. Some one whistled softly. It was a signal, evidently, and came from the farther side of the shed. It was answered by the moving shadow; and, presently, this shadow lost itself behind the garage.

Bennet carefully removed the screen from his window, got out on the kitchen roof in his night clothes, descended to a roof corner, and lowered himself to the top of a rain-water barrel. Reaching the ground, he made his way to the garage,

stole along one side of the building, and crouched and listened.

He could hear two voices. They were pitched so low that he could not distinguish what was said. As a matter of fact, he cared little to do any eavesdropping. He wished merely to discover, if possible, what Ed meant by his night prowling. He recognized Ed's voice; and the other speaker he knew at once to be Hemingway.

This was enough. After Ed's promise to his people that he would have nothing more to do with Alf Hemingway, already by that night's work he was convicted of broken faith.

Bennet made his way swiftly back to the house. The kitchen door was open. Reëntering through the kitchen, he made his way softly up the stairs. The door of his sleeping room had a broken lock and was always unfastened.

He was planning to regain his quarters by the unfastened door; but when he passed Silas' room, which was next to his own, Silas stepped out in the gloom of the upper hall and confronted him.

"I ketched ye at it!" whispered Silas. "Gol bing! 'Than, I wouldn't 'a' thought it of ye. Come in here a minute."

Taking Bennet by the arm, Silas pulled him into his own chamber and carefully closed the door.

"I was readin' late," Silas went on, still in the same excited whisper, "an' I hadn't much more'n put out my light when I heerd ye working at yer windo'. I watched when ye clim' down from the lean-to and went off to the garrij. I like ye a heap, Than, but I won't stand it to let ye run off with the fambly flivver." Silas' nerves were in a terrible state. He panted, and his whispering voice was unsteady.

"What in the world do I want with the family flivver, Sile?" Bennet asked.

"The's a gang been pickin' up flivvers. I'll bet the's money in it or the gang wouldn't be doin' it."

"And you think I'm one of the gang?"

"Dunno; but your actions are blame' queer, Than." Silas paused a moment, then something else struck him. "Ye went out by the windo' an' come in by a door. How'd ye do it? Doors is allers locked at night. Pick the lock?"

"I wasn't examining the garage to see if I could open it and get at the car. If you had watched me closely, Sile, you would have seen that I didn't go near the door of the shed."

"Was it the two hundred dollars, the school money ye was after, then?"

"What two hundred dollars?"

"Why, the money Perry Ransom brought to Jud to pay off the carpenters to-morrow. Perry told Jud he'd better look out fer you, Than, an' Jud he only laughed at him."

"Jud Spencer knows me better than you do," remarked Bennet; "and I thought you were my friend! Sile, you think I'm a thief, don't you?"

"I'm jest examinin' the ev'dence," answered Silas, half ashamed and with his detective instincts straining hard. "Why'd ye climb out o' yer room, an' how'd ye git back through the house?"

Bennet took Silas by the arm and led him to his own window. "Keep your eye on the garage," he told Silas. "We'll both stand here and wait and watch."

Perhaps two minutes later, two shadows emerged from behind the shed and separated. One shadow moved hastily toward the road, and the other came on to the house. The old stairs creaked under ascending feet, and a door across the hall—the door of Ed's room—was heard to close gently.

"I vum!" gulped Silas, seizing Bennet's arm convulsively with both hands. "That was Ed!"

"Precisely," whispered Bennet in Silas' ear; "that was Ed. He left the house by stealth to keep a date with the man he had told his folks he would have nothing more to do with—Alf Hemingway. I went out across the roof just to shadow Ed and find out, if I could, what he was up to. That's all, Silas."

"What's Ed up to, sneakin' 'round with Hemingway like that?"

"Nothing good, you may be sure. You and I have got to do something for Ed. He needs attention. Mr. and Mrs. Spencer, and even Mollie, have been deceived. If anything is done, Sile, it's all up to you and me."

"Why're you so blamed interested in helpin' Ed? He ain't no friend o' yours."

"But his people are friends of mine!"

They're splendid, Sile, and they have faith in me. For their sake, for Mollie's, I'd do anything to keep Ed from making a fool of himself again. Get it out of your head that because I'm a tramp I must be a thief. Watch Ed more, and watch me less. You've got a keen mind, Sile, and I want you to work with me."

"I'm quicker on the scent than any hound dog ye ever seen," whispered Silas in much gratification. "Sure! I'll work with ye if ye'll tell me what I'm to do. You come back into the house through a door Ed left open when he went out. I git that, right off. What's the next move, Than? Tell Jud?"

"By no means! None of the family must know. Our information is too meager to work on, and we must learn more about Ed and Hemingway. If you find Ed doing anything that looks suspicious, tell me privately about it."

"Right fer you! I got talents fer this sort o' thing, ye'll find. Say, tell ye what, Than! I'll work out a set o' secret signs an' grips, so us two can tip each other off, any time, any place, without any one else ketchin' on."

"All right, Sile," answered Bennet. "Now we'll both go back to bed. But don't forget: Not a word to any one about this night's prowling!"

"I know how to talk, an' I know how to keep mum," said Silas with great wisdom. "Ye can bank on me, Than."

Thereupon the two separated, returned to their beds, and went to sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

NEXT morning, Silas Bagley began keeping a sharp eye on Ed Spencer. Silas' ideas of his detective abilities were no doubt far-fetched and humorous, but he was nevertheless possessed of a native shrewdness which he brought to bear on his new line of work.

Immediately after breakfast, Bennet left for the fields, Mrs. Spencer and Mollie proceeded about their household duties, Jud Spencer made himself comfortable in a rocker on the screened porch off the dining room, and Silas went on duty in another rocker by the sitting-room window.

Ed was not working that morning. He pleaded a headache and stretched himself out in the hammock under the hard maples. Silas, sure that Ed was up to something, watched him through the window like a hawk.

At nine o'clock the R. F. D. carrier passed along the road and stopped at the Spencer box. Ed bounded out of the hammock and made haste to get the mail.

"Expectin' something," thought Silas sagaciously, "which didn't arrive," he said to himself a minute later, noting the disappointed look on the young man's face and the farm paper—the only piece of mail given up by the box—in his hand.

Ed came into the house by the screened porch, gave his father the paper, and went on upstairs to his room, closing his door after him. Silas likewise went upstairs, making the ascent as craftily as his game ankle and the cane would permit.

Leaving his own door ajar by a few inches, he lay down on his bed. It was necessary for him to use his ears now instead of his eyes in keeping track of Ed, and he strained his sense of hearing to the utmost.

He had not long to wait for developments. In a few minutes the door of Ed's room was opened softly, and light footsteps moved along the hall. Mollie had finished the upstairs work, and there was no one on the second floor but Ed and Silas.

Silas heard Ed enter Bennet's room. He was in the room only a short time, and when he came out he went downstairs again. Silas followed him, but lingered at the foot of the stairs unseen while Ed told his mother he was feeling a lot better and would get a cultivator and go into the late potatoes.

Thereupon Silas resumed his chair in the sitting room, excited and filled with vague suspicions. He whetted his wits for an attack on two points: First, Ed was expecting a letter which did not come. That might mean anything. Second, he had made a stealthy visit to Bennet's room. What was the idea of that?

Silas' deductions were a minus quantity. He had evidence that might be important, but he could make nothing of it.

When Mollie rang the dinner bell,

Silas hobbled out to the barn and met Bennet as he came in from his work.

"I been right on the job, Than," he remarked in his most secretive manner. Then, guarding all approaches to that spot of consultation with his eyes, he made a brief report. "Who, d'ye guess he's expectin' to hear from?" he finished. "And what the nation was he doin' in your room?"

"Give it up, Sile," answered Bennet; "but I'll try and find out what he was doing in my room. Good work!"

"I told ye I was a hound dog when I hit the trail," Silas reminded Bennet. "If I had some false whiskers an' a nickel-plated badge, I'd be as good a detective as any o' them ye read about."

While at dinner, Ed showed a pleasanter side to the tramp hired man. This was so different from his usual custom that Mollie was tremendously pleased. Silas was bothered by the sudden change in Ed's manner. Bennet, however, felt that some trouble was brewing and that Ed's genial manner was assumed for a purpose. When the meal was finished, Bennet went up to his room.

Nothing seemed out of place in the small chamber. Bennet looked into the drawer of his wash stand. It held only his shaving kit. He lifted the pillows and then the mattress of his bed, still without satisfying his curiosity regarding Ed's visit. Next, he went down on his knees at one corner of the room and took a fat bill fold from beneath the rag carpet. This he found to be intact.

A chintz curtain was swung across another corner of the room to form a closet. Bennet went to the curtain, pushed it back and stood humorously regarding the two-piece suit, the new hat, and the shirt—all recent acquisitions to his wardrobe. Then, groping in the breast pocket of the coat, he drew forth a long, worn wallet. That wallet he recognized at a glance as belonging to Jud Spencer. The wallet was empty; and, at once, the smile faded from Bennet's face.

The succeeding chapters of this novel will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out November 15th. It began in the October 15th issue. Back numbers may be obtained from news dealers or the publishers.



FIRES OF THE FALL

By Thomas J. Murray

FAR off the brush fires sink and rise,
 Burning the edges of the autumn night;
 A dull glare spreading down the troubled skies,
 To be erased by dawn's reluctant light.

Smoke spirals on the lawns across the land,
 Where summer's faded raiment feeds the blaze;
 Marking the passing season's last lone stand,
 Before she fares beyond the lotus haze.

These fires light our dreams to be recalled
 When snows come driving down from arctic lane;
 And when with stretching winter we are walled,
 The fires of the fall with us remain.

TOP-NOTCH TALK

News and Views by the
Editor and Readers.

NOVEMBER 1, 1924.

Top-Notch in Camp

WE published, recently a letter from the first mate of an ocean-going tramp, who reads his TOP-NOTCHES in his cabin as his ship rolls and tosses on the seas. Now we are giving you a letter showing how the magazine is enjoyed amid entirely different surroundings. It is easy for the mate to lie in his cabin bunk and read without any disturbance beyond perhaps the howling of the wind or the slap of the waves against the vessel; but those of you who have enjoyed the pleasure of camp life know all the diversions thereof, and you realize, that with the call of the great outdoors all around, you have little time or inclination for reading.

The boys at Pine Tree Camp, on Schroon Lake, in the Adirondacks, New York, however, found time to do a considerable amount of magazine reading, and, what is more, found time on August 30th to send us the following letter:

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: One of the fellows at camp received a copy of the August 15th issue of TOP-NOTCH a few days ago, and despite the excitement of the last week of a camping season, quite a few of the fellows found time to read and enjoy the stories.

Although the stories are mighty fine, the one entitled "A Matter of Horses," by Joseph T. Kescel, was voted best by a majority of the campers. "Andy Molten" made a hit with them all. The author's choice of a title is to be commended. It drew the attention of all the youngsters.

Your magazine is by far the best of all those received at camp, and, believe me, that is no small number. We think your choice of various kinds of stories has proved its worth to all your readers. They have the opportunity of reading stories of every type between two covers and sold for the small sum of fifteen cents.

Congratulations on your most interesting magazine! Let us have more stories from

Joseph T. Kescel and our old friend Burt L. Standish.

Some of the fellows wish to sign this as evidence that they are back of my views. Yours for luck, EDGAR C. SPIVEY.

The following signatures were added to the letter: Thomas Fox; Malcolm Barman; William Cohen; H. W. Alexander; "Don" Weill; Arthur Levy, Jr.; Ernest T. Sherry; Howard Walter; Arthur L. Sutton; Joseph E. Fox; Walter Epstein.

Our best thanks to the boys of Pine Tree Camp, who not only enjoyed reading TOP-NOTCH, but took the trouble, amid the rush and excitement of striking camp, to write to let us know that they did. We are sure that in future years TOP-NOTCH will be considered an essential part of their camp outfit, and we have no doubt that during the long winter evenings, the ideal time for reading, they will not forget the favorite magazine of Pine Tree Camp.



In the Next Number

A NOVEL by Roland Ashford Phillips is something that all our readers look forward to with pleasure. Mr. Phillips is a master of the art of writing entertaining fiction, and his latest story which you will get in the issue that will come to you on November 15th fully sustains his reputation. It is called "Rogues of the Air;" a gripping story of crime and mystery centered around men who fly.

The novelette will be by Frank Richardson Pierce, and he calls it "A Thousand a Minute." It is a stirring tale of college football, in which an Alaskan participates, and you can enjoy this story whether you know anything about the game or not.

There will be two other sport features: a clever tale of boxing by C. S. Montanye, called "Symbols of Fortune," and a novel basketball story by Ernest A. Phillips, entitled "Elevated Victory."

A splendid story of the sea will be the contribution of Douglas Newton. He calls it "Ghost of the Bright Star."

"Truth at Any Price" is the title of Ernest Douglas' newspaper story. Mr. Douglas' last story was so much appreciated that he is giving you another one along the same lines. W. D. Hoffman will supply a Western tale entitled "Branded with Buckshot," written in his usual fascinating style. "The Widow in the Case" is the title of a bit of Western humor by Chester Porter Bissell, a newcomer to TOP-NOTCH, whom we are sure you will welcome. And there will be a little story of the South African diamond mines by Oliver Johnson Keyes, which he calls "Diamond Lure."

The next installments of the serial novels, "To the Checkered Flag," by John Mersereau, and "Traveler's Luck," by William Wallace Cook, will also claim your attention.

The poems will be: "To an Ex-Aviator," by Faith Baldwin; "Thanksgiving Again!" by James Edward Hungerford; "On the Water Front," by Burt Franklin Jenness; and "Look Ahead!" by Arthur R. Boffo.

Likes Kescel's Story

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I consider the TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE one of the best magazines running. J. T. Kescel's story, "A Matter of Horses," which appeared in the August 15th issue, was a very good story. All of the stories which appear in TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE hold the reader in suspense until the climax of the story. Yours very truly,

WILLIAM KIBITZ.

East One Hundred and Seventy-fifth Street, Bronx, N. Y. C.

Enough Said!

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: A quarter-century incurable-habit student of your magazine course in the world's best current literature comes up to breathe unbounded appreciation and thanks.

Comparisons are odious, hence permit the writer merely to express the opinion you have published as many stories which will stand the test of time in popular acclaim as any other half dozen publishers, and in accomplishing this it has been in conjunction with a still greater feat—the elimination of more "soon to be rubbish" in current literature from entry in your columns, judging by

the small percentage which has crept in, than any other well-known magazine. Enough said! You will of course keep it up. Yours very truly,
WILLIAM RIDER.
Park Ridge, Ill.

Every One a Winner

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I am now doing a thing that I never did before, writing to a magazine, but after the pleasant hours I've been enjoying by reading TOP-NOTCH stories I just feel that I have to let you know it, even though it is 11.10 p. m., and I've got to be up to-morrow morning at five thirty.

The peculiar thing is how it happened I read your magazine. On Labor Day I had a long ride ahead of me, and going into a stationery store I was looking all over the rack for the magazine I was in the habit of buying, but they were all sold. Then I saw the attractive cover of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE, which really made me buy it, and I certainly was surprised when I started to read it and found the magazine to contain the same kind of stories I used to buy three different magazines for. Every one of the stories I read was a winner—at least after my idea—and if the coming stories are just as good you will have in me a booster for your magazine any time, and I will never miss one of them.

I cannot pick out *one* story and tell you I like it best, because they're all good. Thanking you again and wishing you success. Yours very truly,

A. C. RIEDEL.

Bender's Place, Cliffside, N. J.

Likes Rouse Best

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I am just reading the last issue of TOP-NOTCH. It sure is a fine number. The two serial novels in it are very good. The short stories are also very good.

My favorite authors are about the same as usual—W. W. Cook, A. M. Treynor, Burt L. Standish, George Goodchild, and W. M. Rouse. I think the latter's stories are the best short stories in all the fiction magazines.

I have read about all kinds of stories in your magazines, but stories of the slums and underground Chinatown criminal stories. You don't publish these.

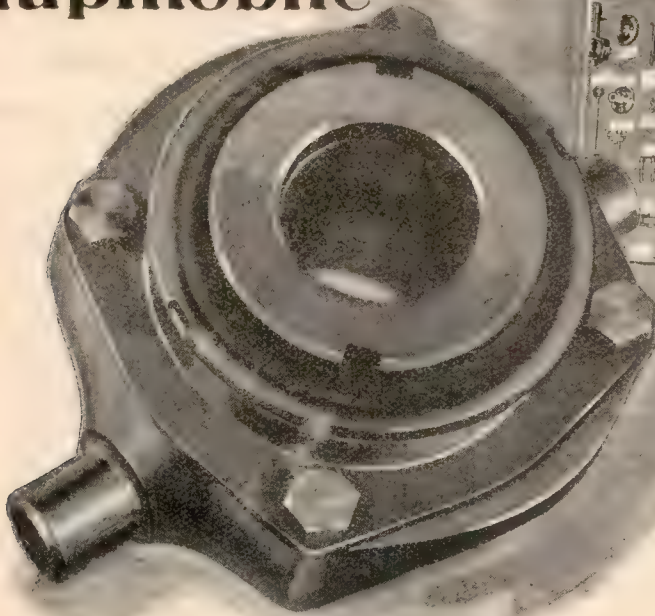
If you keep having the same standard of stories you will have me as a reader until I go blind, which I hope is never.

Wishing your magazine the success, I am, yours truly,

MELVIN DRISKELL.

Huston Avenue, Evansville, Ind.

Hupmobile



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When buying a motor car, remember the good old maxim "Knowledge is power" that we used to write in our copy books.

Now you can quickly obtain positive knowledge of what makes some motor cars stand up and save money for their owners. Also, the plain facts about why some other cars cost so much to maintain.

Learn These Vital Fundamentals

Hupmobile has condensed these invaluable facts—has made them part and parcel of large parts display boards.

Fifteen or twenty minutes spent in studying these object lessons in motor car building will arm you with a real knowledge of what to insist upon, and what to avoid, in any motor car you inspect.

It is as simple as A B C—this business of buying a motor car that will actually save you money.

All that you really must understand are the comparatively few fundamentals of good construction.

For instance, how are the cylinders finished? Are they merely reamed, or are they reamed and honed, as in the case of Hupmobile? Does a car use double heat-treated steel drop-forgings generally, as does Hupmobile, or does it add weight and decrease

strength and economy by using malleable iron castings? How large is the bearing surface which supports the crankshaft? How is the camshaft mounted? What is the best type of bearing for each purpose? And is that best type used? What kind of a lubricating system in the motor?

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It is far more comfortable, and so much better in the long run, to *know* just what you are buying—and that knowledge awaits you at your nearest Hupmobile dealer's.

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Detroit, Michigan

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Vigorous, glowing Health again!

THESE remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to Fleischmann's Yeast. There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation—or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach and general health are affected—this simple, natural

food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work—invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. Health is yours once more.

"For years I suffered from habitual constipation. Cathartics gave but temporary relief. I could not enjoy my favorite dishes without fear of flatulence, disturbed sleep, etc. I read of the merits of Fleischmann's Yeast. In despair I took the Yeast haphazardly—later—three times daily. Today I hardly know myself—face all aglow with the pink of health—no constipation annoyances. Again I eat my favorite New England boiled dinner without after-discomfort!"

(Mr. G. Henderson Coyle of Detroit, Mich.)



"Fleischmann's Yeast gave me everything that four years' chronic constipation, with its then continual purgative taking, took from me. As a 'rifeman' I saw active service on four fronts, and constipation undermined my constitution until I became a nervous wreck, invalidated from the service; classified neurasthenic, I was awarded a pension with disability 40%. Life was hell. After persuasion I tried Fleischmann's Yeast and now eat well, sleep well and what's better, work well and cheerfully. A month ago I wrote the pension authorities asking for a final award. I don't need my pension any longer."

(Mr. Charles H. Ward, Halifax, N.S.)



"I did not eat six cakes of Yeast and feel myself improving immediately. In fact for one month I used 3 cakes a day without any visible improvement. But by the middle of August, 1921, my chronic constipation commenced to give way—I again consulted our family physician, who told me to use no other remedies but Fleischmann's Yeast. . . . Today my stomach troubles have become ancient history, and my skin eruption a thing of the past—thanks to the remarkable effects of Fleischmann's Yeast."

(Miss Ruth Rollband, Utica, N.Y.)



Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain.

Fleischmann's Yeast for Health comes only in the tin foil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet

form. *All grocers have it.* Start eating it today! You can order several cakes at a time, for yeast will keep fresh in a cool, dry place for two or three days.



Write us for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-10, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.



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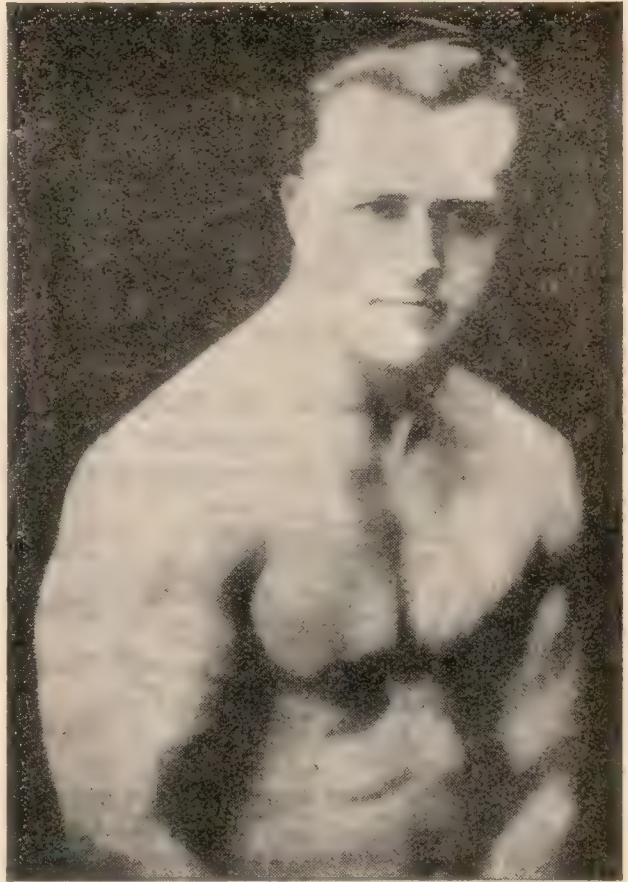
and I offered you something that would give you ten years more to live, would you take it? You'd grab it. Well, fellows, I've got it, but don't wait till you're dying or it won't do you a bit of good. It will then be too late. Right now is the time. To-morrow or any day, some disease will get you and if you have not equipped yourself to fight it off, you're gone. I don't claim to cure disease. I am not a medical doctor, but I'll put you in such condition that the doctor will starve to death waiting for you to take sick. Can you imagine a mosquito trying to bite a brick wall? A fine chance.

A Re-built Man

I like to get the weak ones. I delight in getting hold of a man who has been turned down as hopeless by others. It's easy enough to finish a task that's more than half done. But give me the weak, sickly chap and watch him grow stronger. That's what I like. It's fun to me because I know I can do it and I like to give the other fellow the laugh. I don't just give you a veneer of muscle that looks good to others. I work on you both inside and out. I not only put big, massive arms and legs on you, but I build up those inner muscles that surround your vital organs. The kind that give you real pep and energy, the kind that fire you with ambition and the courage to tackle anything set before you.

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Who says it takes years to get in shape? Show me the man who makes any such claims and I'll make him eat his words. I'll put one full inch on your arm in just 30 days. Yes, and two full inches on your chest in the same length of time. Meanwhile, I'm putting life and pep into your old back-bone. And from then on, just watch 'em grow. At the end of thirty days you won't know yourself. Your whole body will take on an entirely different appearance. But you've only started. Now comes the real work. I've only built my foundation. I want just 60 days more (90 in all) and you'll make those friends of yours who think they're strong look like something the cat dragged in.



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A Real Man

When I'm through with you, you're a real man. The kind that can prove it. You will be able to do things that you had thought impossible. And the beauty of it is you keep on going. Your deep full chest breathes in rich pure air, stimulating your blood and making you just bubble over with vim and vitality. Your huge square shoulders and your massive muscular arms have that craving for the exercise of a regular he man. You have the flash to your eye and the pep to your step that will make you admired and sought after in both the business and social world.

This is no idle prattle, fellows. If you doubt me, make me prove it. Go ahead. I like it. I have already done this for thousands of others and my records are unchallenged. What I have done for them, I will do for you. Come then, for time flies and every day counts. Let this very day be the beginning of new life to you.

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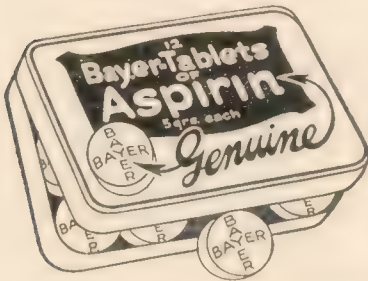
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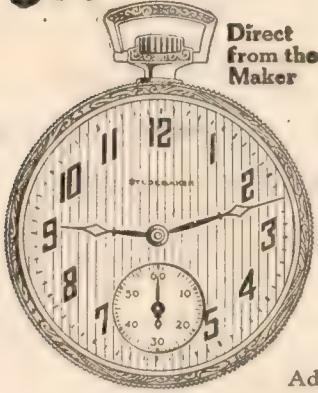
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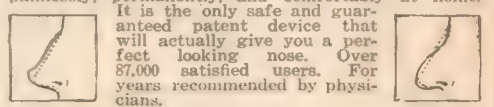
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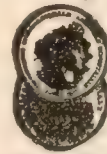
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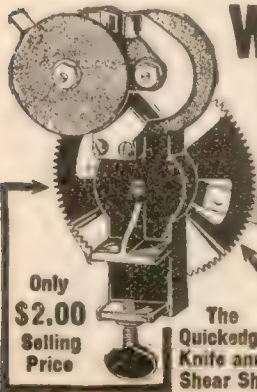
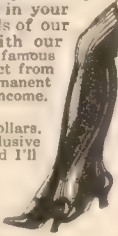
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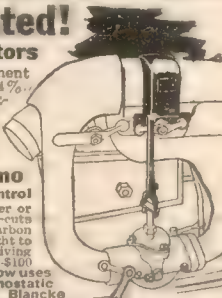
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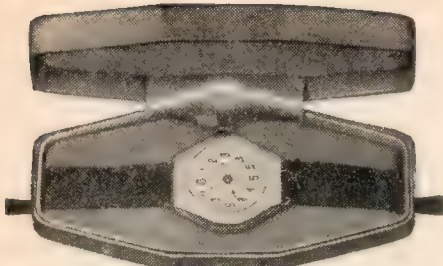
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Mail coupon today for free trial bottle of Mary T. Goldman's Hair Color Restorer. Test as directed on a single lock and watch results. Watch gray streaks disappear and beautiful, even, natural color return. No streaks or discoloration, no "dyed" look.

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\$1,000.00 in cash prizes For NEW ways of using

G. Washington's Delicious-Instant Coffee

Housewives everywhere know G. Washington's Coffee—how good—how convenient it is. The coffee ready to drink when dissolved in hot water. The coffee with the delicious flavor.

G. Washington's Coffee is wonderful for preparing desserts, ices, jellies, cakes, candies and other dainties. By simply adding G. Washington's Coffee to other ingredients, a delicious coffee flavor is obtained. It comes in concentrated powdered form and no water is required. Its use in desserts is simplicity itself and results are certain.

If you can make good cake, a new dessert or confection, enter this contest, which is limited to those who have used G. Washington's Coffee prior to September 1, 1924.

\$1,000 in cash prizes for new G. Washington's Coffee recipes. First prize is \$500. No restrictions, no conditions.

LIST OF PRIZES

For G. Washington's Coffee New Recipes	
For the best	\$500
For the next best	250
For the next best	75
For the next best	50
For the next best	25
For the 20 next best, \$5 each	100
Twenty-five prizes in all	\$1,000

Contest Closes Dec. 31, 1924

All prizes will be paid on or before February 1st, 1925, and in event of tie for any prize offered, the full amount of such prize will be awarded to tying contestants.

The judges of the contest will be chosen from a selected list of managers and famous chefs of the leading hotels of New York City.

Write recipe on one side of paper only. No letters can be answered concerning the contest. All recipes must be mailed on or before December 31, 1924, and to become our property.

Use the coupon below, or a copy of it, attaching your suggestions for new recipes.

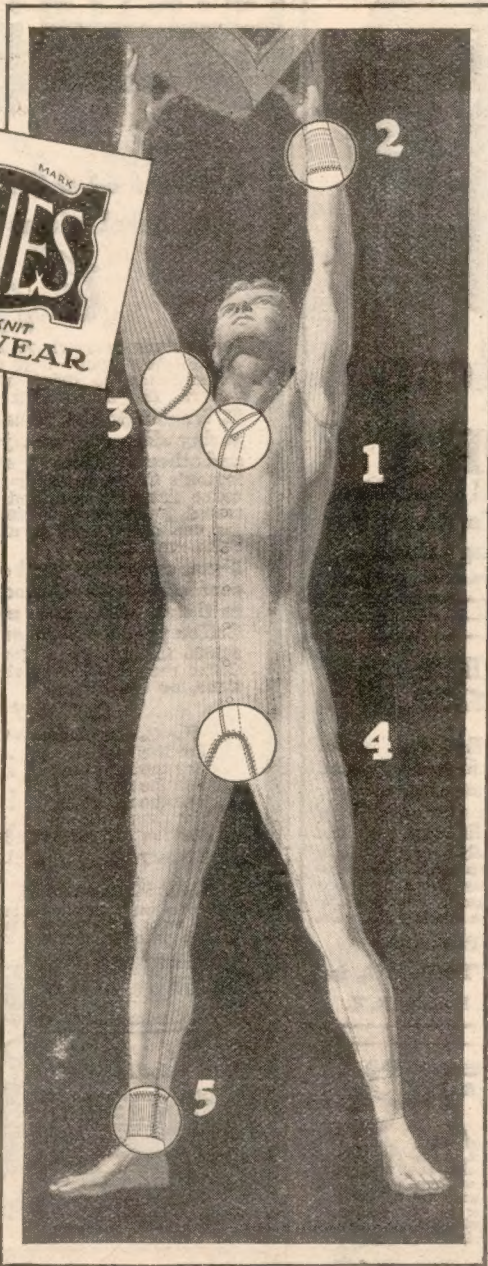


COUPON

G. Washington Coffee Refining Co. 522 Fifth Ave., New York City, Contest Dept. No. 7. Enclosed find recipes for using G. Washington's Coffee.

Name.....
Street and No.....
City..... State.....

5 famous points



1

HANES Collarettes are cut to size. A 40 suit has a 40 collarette. Won't roll or pucker. Protect the chest from cold draughts, and let the top-shirt lie smooth.

2

HANES Cuffs won't pull off. They snug the wrist. Reinforced on the end to prevent raveling and gaping. Sleeves are exact length—not uneven.

3

HANES Elastic Shoulders give with every movement, because they're made with a service-doubling lap seam. Comfortable. Strong.

4

HANES Closed Crotch really STAYS closed. Double gusset in thigh another comfort feature. Crotch can't bind, for HANES is fitted by TRUNK measurement, as well as chest.

5

HANES Elastic Ankles never bunch over the shoe-tops. No ugly pucker showing under the socks. One leg is exactly the same length as the other. They're mates!

Write your own ticket—**HANES** measures up

MAKE your own specifications. Put in all the things good winter underwear should have to suit you. Put a price on it that is below what you would expect to pay for such underwear. Then go to the HANES dealer and see the very suit of underwear you have in mind!

No two ways about it, Men, HANES is the best winter underwear in the world for the money. Just read those 5 Famous Points again, go see the actual garments, compare them point by point and *know* that your underwear money can't buy bigger value.

HANES comfort is real. And HANES wear matches HANES comfort. The red label is a definite guarantee that every thread, stitch and button will give the kind of service you have a right to demand, or your money back. Buy HANES this winter! Union suits, also shirts-and-drawers. Three weights. We especially recommend the HANES Heavy Weight for all practical purposes.

Boys can also write their own ticket. HANES Boys' Underwear is made of the same materials and with the same care. Union suits only. Two weights—heavy and extra heavy. Sizes 2 to 16 years. 2 to 4 year sizes with drop seats. Also knee length and short sleeves.

P. H. HANES KNITTING COMPANY, Winston-Salem, N. C.

Next summer, wear Hanes full-cut athletic Union Suits!

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Goodrich Tires represent a *new economy* in motoring. They introduce a value, new to motorists.

New ideas, new methods, systemization, and simplification, sound business practices, all the direct development of more than a half century of making and marketing rubber goods, have achieved a matchless quality at an unparalleled low cost.

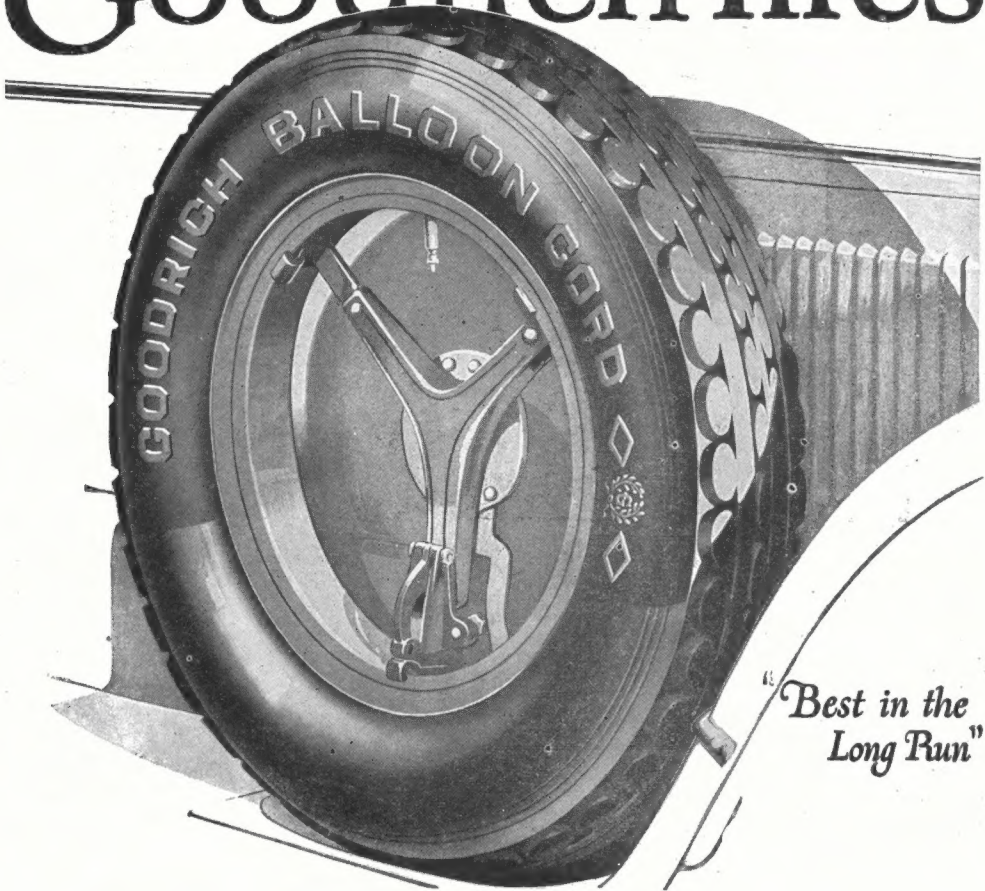
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—TRACTOR TYPE · DE LUXE CUSHIONS · INDUSTRIAL TRUCK TIRES

THE B. F. GOODRICH RUBBER COMPANY, Akron, Ohio
In Canada: The B. F. Goodrich Rubber Company, Limited, Toronto.

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This is why today you can motor better on less money. Consult a Goodrich Dealer on how you can best share the new Goodrich Value.

Goodrich Tires

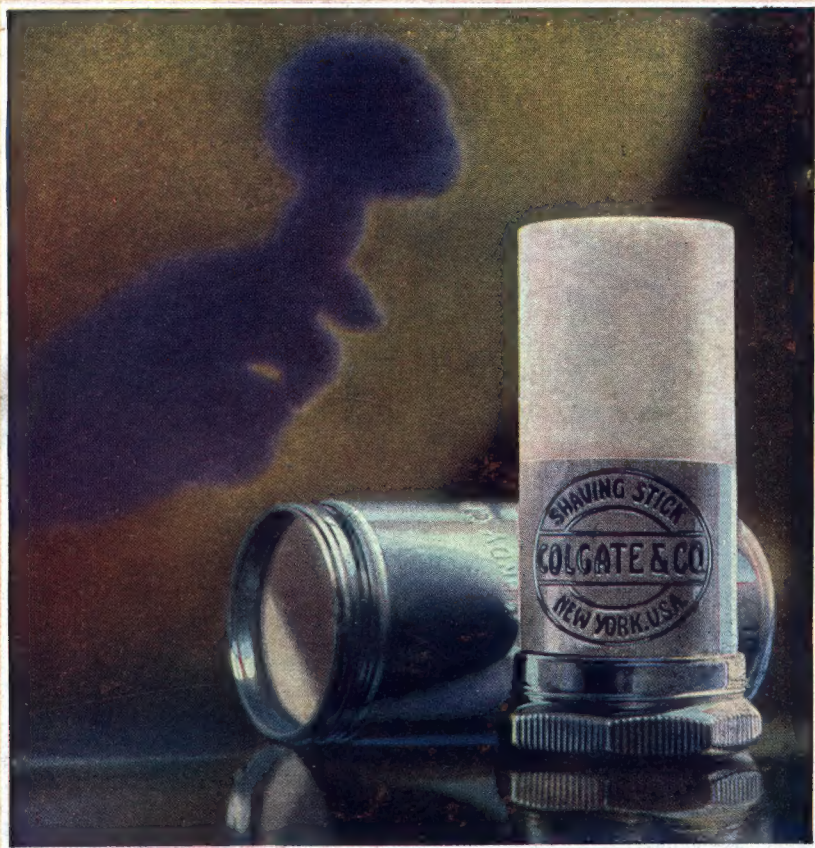


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In its attractive nickel box, our

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The famous "Handy Grip", with a trial-size shaving stick in nickel box, sent for 10c. When the trial stick is gone, buy Colgate "Refills" for the price of the soap alone, 25c.

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